Al-Isrāʾ is a late Makkansūrah, and most commentators consider the whole of it to have been revealed in Makkah (Āl, IJ). Some, however, consider vv. 73 and 76 to be Madinan, and others have suggested variously that vv. 60, 74–75, 80, and 107 may also have been revealed in Madinah (Āl, IJ, Q).

The sūrah takes its name from the elliptical reference in the first verse to the Night Journey (isrāʾ) of the Prophet from Makkah to Jerusalem from where the Nocturnal Ascent (al-miʿrāj) took place. This journey is likely to have taken place around the year 619, toward the end of the Prophet’s time in Makkah and just after the death of his beloved wife Khadijah and his uncle Abū Ṭālib, who had long sheltered him from the idolaters. This Night Journey (isrāʾ) to Jerusalem and the Ascension (miʿrāj) of the Prophet from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple in that city through the seven heavens, where he encountered several Judeo-Christian prophets and finally came within two bows’ length of God Himself or nearer (53:9; see commentary on 53:7–18), is one of the most significant spiritual events in the Prophet’s life. From this time onward, the Islamic community saw itself as deeply connected to the Jewish and Christian prophetic heritage, and this is one of the reasons that Jerusalem was and is revered as a sacred city for Muslims, serving also as the direction of prayer for the Muslim community for several years thereafter, until 2/624. The Prophet was also reportedly given the final form of the Islamic canonical prayer (ṣalāh) during his Ascension. This sūrah is also sometimes
referred to as the *Sūrat Banī Isrāʾīl* (IJ), because vv. 2–8 discuss the Children of Israel and the historical destruction that came upon them and their Temple, or as *Subḥān* (“Glory”) after the opening word of the *sūrah* (Āl).

This *sūrah* contains several themes and elements common to later Makkān *sūrah*s, including references to God’s Power over the natural world (vv. 66–70), repeated warnings to human beings about the coming of Divine Punishment either on earth or in the Hereafter (vv. 13–18, 58–59, 71–72), and criticism of the idolaters’ ascribing partners and daughters to God (vv. 39–41), their imperviousness to Quranic guidance (vv. 45–47), their disingenuous requests for miracles as proof of Muhammad’s prophethood (vv. 90–96), and their denial of the Resurrection and Final Judgment (vv. 49–52, 97–99). In vv. 70–76, the Prophet is said to have nearly succumbed to the idolaters’ attempt to lead him away from the revelations that he had received, but that God made him firm. The *sūrah* also contains exhortations to the believers: in vv. 22–38, they are told to be virtuous and charitable and to avoid major sins, such as idolatry, murder, and adultery, as well as dishonesty, excessive curiosity, and pride; and in vv. 78–79, they are instructed to perform the mandatory prayers at different times of the day and night and the supererogatory night vigil. There are also some brief accounts of certain pre-Islamic prophets, including an account of Adam’s creation and fall (vv. 61–65) as well as Moses’ confrontation with Pharaoh and deliverance of the Israelites (vv. 101–4). Finally, the *sūrah* discusses various qualities of the Quran itself, including its benefits for humanity, its revelation by means of the Spirit, its use of parables, its division into sections, and its effects upon the believers (vv. 82–89; 105–9).

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1. Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer. 2. And We gave unto Moses the Book, and We made it a guidance for
the Children of Israel—“Take no guardian apart from Me”— the progeny of those whom We carried with Noah. Truly he was a thankful servant. And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book, “Surely you will work corruption upon the earth twice, and you will ascend to great height.” So when the promise of the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of Ours, possessed of great might, and they ravaged your dwellings, and it was a promise fulfilled. Then We gave you a turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children, and We made you greater in number. If you are virtuous, you are virtuous for the sake of your own souls, and if you commit evil, it is for them. So when the other promise comes to pass, they will make wretched your faces, and enter the Temple as they entered it the first time, and utterly ruin whatsoever they overtake. It may be that your Lord will have mercy upon you, but if you revert, We shall revert. And We have made Hell a prison for the disbelievers. Truly this Quran guides toward that which is most upright, and gives glad tidings to the believers who perform righteous deeds that theirs shall be a great reward, and that We have prepared a painful punishment for those who believe not in the Hereafter. Man prays for evil as he prays for good, and man is ever hasty. We made the night and the day two signs. Then We effaced the sign of the night, and made the sign of the day, giving sight, that you might seek bounty from your Lord, and that you might know the number of years and the reckoning. And We have expounded everything in detail. And [for]
every man We have fastened his omen upon his neck, and We shall bring it forth for him on the Day of Resurrection as a book he will meet wide open. “Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you.” Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. None shall bear the burden of another. And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger. And when We desire to destroy a town, We command those who live a life of luxury within it; yet they commit iniquity therein. Thus the Word comes due against it and We annihilate it completely. How many a generation have We destroyed after Noah! Thy Lord suffices as One Aware of the sins of His servants, Seeing. Whosoever would desire the ephemeral, We hasten for him therein whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire. Then We appointed Hell for him, wherein he shall burn, blameworthy, banished. And whosoever desires the Hereafter, and endeavors for it earnestly, and is a believer, it is they whose efforts shall be appreciated. Each do We aid—both these and those—with the Gift of thy Lord; and the Gift of thy Lord is not confined. Observe how We have favored some of them over others, and surely the Hereafter is greater in ranking and greater in favor. Do not set up another god along with God, lest you sit blameworthy, forsaken. Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him, and be virtuous to parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, say not to them “Uff!” nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word. Lower unto
them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, “My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small.” Your Lord knows best that which is in your souls. If you are righteous, then verily He is Forgiving toward the penitent. Give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent and the traveler, but do not squander wastefully. Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord. But if thou turnest away from them, seeking a mercy from thy Lord, for which thou dost hope, then speak unto them a gentle word. And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open, lest thou shouldst sit condemned, destitute. Truly thy Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. Verily of His servants He is Aware, Seeing. And slay not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin. And approach not adultery; verily it is indecency and an evil way. And slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right. And whosoever is slain unjustly, We have appointed authority unto his heir. Then let him not be excessive in slaying. Verily he shall be helped. And approach not the orphan’s property, save in the most virtuous manner, till he reaches maturity. And fulfill the pact; surely the pact is called to account. And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and more virtuous in the end. And pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account. And walk not exultantly
upon the earth; surely thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height. 38 The evil of all this is loathsome unto thy Lord. 39 That is from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee. Do not set up another god along with God, lest thou be cast into Hell, condemned, banished. 40 Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word! 41 And We have indeed varied [Our signs] in this Quran, that they might reflect, though it increased them in naught but aversion. 42 Say, “If there were gods with Him, as they say, they would surely seek a way unto the Possessor of the Throne.” 43 Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above whatsoever they say. 44 The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving. 45 And when thou recitest the Quran, We place a hidden veil between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter. 46 And We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. And whenever thou dost mention thy Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion. 47 We know best that which they listen for when they listen to thee, and when they converse in secret, when the wrongdoers say, “You follow naught but a man bewitched!” 48 Look how they set forth descriptions of thee. Thus they go astray and cannot find a way. 49 They say, “What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?” 50 Say, “Be you of
stone, or of iron, or some other created thing more difficult [to resurrect] to your minds.” Then they will say, “Who will bring us back?” Say, “He Who originated you the first time.” And they will shake their heads at thee and say, “When will it be?” Say, “It may well be nigh.” The Day when He calls you, you will respond by praising Him, and you will think that you tarried but a short while. Say unto My servants that they should say that which is more virtuous. Surely Satan provokes ill feeling between them. Surely Satan is a manifest enemy unto man. Your Lord knows you best. If He wills, He has Mercy upon you, and if He wills, He punishes you, and We have not sent thee as a guardian over them. And thy Lord knows best whosoever is in the heavens and the earth. And We indeed favored some of the prophets over others, and unto David We gave the Psalms. Say, “Call upon those whom you claim apart from Him, but they have no power to remove affliction from you, nor to change [it].” It is they who make supplication, seeking a means of approach to their Lord. Which of them is nearer? And they hope for His Mercy and fear His Punishment. Truly the Punishment of thy Lord is something of which to be wary. There is no town, save that We shall destroy it before the Day of Resurrection, or punish it with a severe punishment. That is inscribed in the Book. Naught hinders Us from sending signs, save that those of old denied them. And We gave unto Thamūd the she-camel as a clear portent, but they wronged her. And We do not send down Our signs, save to inspire fear. And [remember] when We said unto thee,
“Surely thy Lord encompasses mankind.” We did not ordain the vision that We showed thee, save as a trial for mankind, and the Accursed Tree in the Quran. And We inspire fear in them, but it increases them in naught but great rebellion. 61 And when We said unto the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” they all prostrated, save Iblīs. He said, “Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?” 62 He said, “Dost Thou see this, which Thou hast honored above me? If Thou dost grant me reprieve till the Day of Resurrection, I shall surely gain mastery over his progeny, all save a few.” 63 He said, “Go! And whosoever among them should follow thee, surely Hell shall be thy recompense—an ample recompense! 64 So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice, and bear down upon them with thy cavalry and thy infantry, and be their partner in wealth and children, and make them promises.” Satan promises them naught but delusion. 65 “As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them.” And thy Lord suffices as a Guardian. 66 Your Lord is He Who makes the ships sail upon the sea, that you might seek of His Bounty. Verily, He is Merciful unto you. 67 And whenever affliction befalls you at sea, forgotten are those whom you would call upon, save for Him. Then when He has delivered you safely to land, you turn away. Man is ever ungrateful! 68 Do you feel secure that He will not cause the shore to engulf you or unleash a torrent of stones upon you? Then would you find no guardian for yourselves. 69 Or do you feel secure that He will not cause you to return to it another time, and unleash upon you a
tempestuous wind, and drown you for your having been ungrateful? Then you would find no avenger therein against Us. 70 We have indeed honored the Children of Adam, and We carry them over land and sea, and provide them with good things, and We have favored them above many We have created. 71 On the Day We shall call every people by their imam, whosoever is given his book in his right hand, it is they who shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged so much as the thread of a date stone. 72 And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way. 73 And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee, that thou mightest falsely ascribe unto Us something other than it, whereupon they would surely have taken thee as a friend. 74 And had We not made thee firm, thou wouldst certainly have inclined toward them a little. 75 Then We would have made thee taste double in life and double in death. Then thou wouldst have found for thyself no helper against Us. 76 And they were about to incite thee from the land, in order to expel thee therefrom, whereupon they would not have tarried after thee, save a little— 77 the wont of those among Our messengers whom We sent before thee. And thou wilt find no change in Our wont. 78 Perform the prayer at the declining of the sun till the darkening of the night. And the recitation at dawn—truly, the recitation at dawn is ever witnessed! 79 And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee. It may be that thy Lord will resurrect thee in a praiseworthy station. 80 And say, “My Lord! Make me
enter in a sincere manner, and make me go forth in a sincere manner, and ordain for me, from Thy Presence, an authority to help me.” 81 Say, “Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing.” 82 And We send down of the Quran that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers. And it increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss. 83 And whenever We bestow a blessing upon man, he turns away and withdraws. And whenever evil befalls him, he is in despair. 84 Say, “Each acts according to his disposition, and your Lord knows well who is more rightly guided on the way.” 85 They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, “The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little.” 86 And if We willed, We could take away that which We revealed unto thee. Then thou wouldst not find, for thyself, any guardian against Us, save a mercy from thy Lord. Truly His Bounty toward thee is ever great. 87 Say, “Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another.” 88 And indeed We have employed every kind of parable for mankind in this Quran. Yet most of mankind refuse aught but disbelief. 89 And they say, “We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth, or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it, or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us, or till you have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to
Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till you bring down unto us a book we can read.” Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?” And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, “Has God sent a human being as a messenger?” Say, “Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.” Say, “God suffices as a Witness between you and me. Verily, of His servants He is Aware, Seeing.” Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protectors for them apart from Him. And We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf—their refuge shall be Hell. Every time it abates, We shall increase for them a blazing flame. That is their recompense for having disbelieved in Our signs. And they say, “What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?” Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create the like of them? And He has ordained for them a term, about which there is no doubt. Yet the wrongdoers refuse aught but disbelief. Say, “Were you to possess the treasuries of my Lord’s Mercy, you would surely withhold them, out of fear of spending. Man is ever miserly!” And We indeed gave unto Moses nine clear signs. So ask the Children of Israel. When he came unto them, Pharaoh said, “Truly I think that you, O Moses, are bewitched!” He said, “You certainly know
that no one has sent these down as clear portents, save the Lord of the heavens and the earth. And truly I think that you, O Pharaoh, are doomed.” And he desired to incite them from the land; so We drowned him and those with him all together. And We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel, “Dwell in the land. And when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass, We shall bring you as a mixed assembly.” In truth We sent it down, and in truth it descended. And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner, and [We sent it down] as a recitation We have divided in parts, that thou mayest recite it unto men in intervals, and We sent it down in successive revelations. Say, “Believe in it, or believe not.” Surely those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces. And they say, “Glory be to our Lord! The Promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled.” And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility. Say, “Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. And be not loud in your prayer, nor too quiet therein, but seek a way between.” And say, “Praise be to God, who has no child! He has no partner in sovereignty; nor has He any protector out of lowliness.” And proclaim His Greatness!

**Commentary**

1. Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from
the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that We might show him some of Our signs. Truly He is the Hearer, the Seer.

1 This verse refers to the Prophet’s Night Journey (al-īsrāʾ), considered by most to have taken place a year or two prior to the migration to Madinah (R, Z). The Prophet was reportedly taken upon a winged horse, named Burāq, and led by the Archangel Gabriel to Jerusalem; from there he ascended through the seven heavens and came before God Himself. The whole experience occurred outside the realm of ordinary time, because, despite the great distance between Makkah and Jerusalem, the Prophet is said to have made the journey and returned in a single night; according to some, the door of his house, through which he passed when he left on the journey, was still swinging on its hinges when he returned. This event is foundational in the life of the Prophet Muhammad and for Islamic spirituality, and most of the Prophet’s Companions agreed that this miraculous journey took place physically and not only spiritually, although a few maintained that it was an inner, purely spiritual journey. Mainstream Islamic tradition holds, however, that the Ascension (miʿrāj) was bodily as well as spiritual and considers it a special miracle granted to the Prophet, although spiritual ascension is believed by some Muslims, particularly Sufis, to be a possibility open to all Muslims who follow a spiritual path in this life. Indeed, a well-known ḥadīth states, “The canonical prayer (ṣalāh) is the ascension (miʿrāj) of the believers.”

Detailed accounts of the Night Journey exist in the Hadīth, and the event resonates throughout Islamic literature, especially in mystical works, where the journey is seen as the prototype for all spiritual journeying toward the encounter with God. This central spiritual event in the life of the Prophet has also been the subject of some of the greatest masterpieces of Islamic miniature painting and poetry. Elements of the account of the Prophet’s Night Journey may have even influenced accounts of mystical journeying in other traditions, such as Dante’s Divine Comedy, whose architecture of the heavens is similar to that described in accounts of the Prophet’s ascension, some of which had reached the Latin West.

Jerusalem is considered the third most sacred site for Muslims primarily because of the Prophet’s miraculous journey to the city and his heavenly ascension from the site of the ancient Jewish Temple located there. In fact, after the Prophet’s return from the Night Journey and for several years thereafter, the Prophet and the Muslim community prayed in the direction of Jerusalem, making the city the first direction of prayer (al-qiblat al-ūlā), which also contributes to its sacred status in Islam. The direction of prayer was changed from Jerusalem to Makkah in the year 2/624, after the revelation of 2:143–44, which instructed the Prophet and the Muslim community to turn in prayer toward the Sacred Mosque in Makkah; see
commentary on these verses.

Despite the importance of the Prophet’s Night Journey and Ascension, the Quran’s mention of this event is brief and elliptical. The present verse is considered to refer to the first, “horizontal,” part of the journey, from Makkah to Jerusalem (isrāʾ), while 53:1–18 contains allusions to the Prophet’s experience during the “vertical” part of the journey, that is, his Ascension (miʿrāj) through the seven heavens to the Divine Throne and the encounter with God. In the present verse, then, His servant is a reference to Muhammad who was carried . . . by night from the Sacred Mosque in Makkah to the Farthest Mosque, referring to the site of the ancient Temple in Jerusalem, which today is the site of the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock, inside which is the rock from which the Prophet ascended to the Divine Throne. Carried . . . by night translates asrā . . . laylān. The verb asrā by itself means to travel at night, and thus the additional qualifier, laylān, by night or “in a night,” emphasizes that this journey from Makkah to Jerusalem and back again—a journey that would ordinarily have taken over a month at that time—was accomplished in a single night (R, Z). Although a few have identified the Sacred Mosque with the environs of Makkah generally (Ṭ, Z), the literal reading of the verse indicates that he left from the Sacred Mosque itself (Z). The literal interpretation is further supported by a hadīth describing how the Prophet was roused for the journey by the Archangel Gabriel as he lay between sleeping and waking in the sanctuary (ḥaram) that immediately surrounds the Kaʿbah (IK, R, Z).

The Farthest Mosque translates al-masjid al-aqṣā, which is also the name given by Muslims to the mosque built in Jerusalem in the first/seventh century near the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, which had been destroyed centuries earlier by the Romans. The precincts of the Jerusalem Temple are referred to as the Farthest Mosque, according to some, because it was the farthest sacred place visited by the Prophet and the farthest place in which he prayed during his lifetime (Ṭ), although he had likely traveled farther, to Damascus, for trade before he became a prophet. The precincts We have blessed refers to Jerusalem and its environs, comprising the Biblical land of Canaan; see also 7:137; 21:71, 81. Some reports indicate that the blessedness of the land referred to its fertility and its abundant fruits and crops (Ṭ), although others indicate that it was blessed with both worldly and spiritual bounty, since many prophets had worshipped or received revelation there (R, Z). Our signs may include the miraculous journey itself as well as the visions and encounters with past prophets, angels, and God Himself that the Prophet reportedly experienced during its course.

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And We gave unto Moses the Book, and We made it a
guidance for the Children of Israel—“Take no guardian apart from Me”—

3 the progeny of those whom We carried with Noah. Truly he was a thankful servant.

2–3 The Book given to Moses is the Torah. The command to the Israelites, Take no guardian apart from Me, is similar to reminders throughout the Quran that one has no protector other than God (cf., e.g., 2:107, 257; 5:55; 6:14). The progeny of those whom We carried with Noah is an additional description of the Children of Israel in v. 2.

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4 And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book, “Surely you will work corruption upon the earth twice, and you will ascend to great height.”

4 And We decreed for the Children of Israel in the Book is understood by most to mean that God informed the Israelites in the Torah of the events alluded to in this verse (IK, R, T, Z). Some, however, understand this to mean that God decreed these future events in the Preserved Tablet (see 85:22c; Q). For the meaning of the Quranic concept of “working corruption upon the earth” see 7:56c; 30:41c. In the present context, that the Israelites will work corruption upon the earth twice is understood to refer to times of serious deviation from the commands of the Torah (Q, T), which some commentators connect with particular episodes of spiritual crisis for the Israelites described in the Quran, such as their slaying of the prophets (see 2:61c; 4:155; T, Z). Given the subsequent reference to the destruction of dwellings (v. 5) and the desecration of the Temple (v. 7), the present verse may be an allusion to the two times when the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed (the first in 586 BC by the Babylonian army of Nebudchadnezzar and the second by the Romans in AD 70) or to the destruction of the Northern Kingdom, Israel (722 BC), and the Southern Kingdom, Judah (586 BC).

The classical commentators, however, do not seem to have been fully familiar with this history. Events and people associated with these various time periods are mentioned by several commentators in connection with these verses (IK, T), but there is significant chronological confusion in the reports. The commentators thus do not present these two instances of corruption and destruction as directly or
schematically fitting either of these two sets of historical events. Although the literal rendering \textit{you will ascend to great height} may appear positive in context, the commentators understand it to mean that the Israelites had become tyrants (IK, JJ, R), had rebelled against God (IK, Q, Z), or had shown great arrogance toward Him (Q, Ṭ).

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\textbf{5} So when the promise of the first of these came to pass, We sent against you servants of Ours, possessed of great might, and they ravaged your dwellings, and it was a promise fulfilled.

5 The commentators do not agree about which events in Israelite history are being referenced in this verse; some identify the leader of the \textit{servants of Ours} whom God sent against the Israelites as Goliath, Sennacherib, or Nebudchadnezzar (Q, R, Z). Some commentators, however, suggest that the identity of those sent against the Israelites is not significant; what is important is the concept that such a fate befell the Israelites at times of collective moral and spiritual failing (IK, R). That they ravaged your dwellings is explained by some as referring to the plundering of homes and wealth and the destruction of sacred objects, including the desecration of the Temple, the burning of the Torah, and the killing of those trained to read it (IK, R, Z), as well as taking the remaining Israelites into captivity (R). That it was a promise fulfilled indicates that it was a fate decreed by God that could not be avoided (R).

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\textbf{6} Then We gave you a turn against them, and We aided you with wealth and children, and We made you greater in number.

6 God gave the Israelites \textit{a turn against them}, after they had repented of the corruption and arrogance mentioned in v. 4 (Z). Some consider this change of fortune to refer to the killing of Goliath or, more commonly, to the defeat of Babylon, the liberation of the land from the oppressors (Ṭ, Z), and the Israelites’ subsequent ability to return to the area around Jerusalem, during which time new prophets rose among them (R). God’s aiding the Israelites \textit{with wealth and}
children indicates that He increased them in worldly prosperity, since wealth and children are two common signifiers of earthly good fortune in the Quran (see, e.g., 18:46). That He made them greater in number means He increased the size of their population (Ṭ).

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7 If you are virtuous, you are virtuous for the sake of your own souls, and if you commit evil, it is for them. So when the other promise comes to pass, they will make wretched your faces, and enter the Temple as they entered it the first time, and utterly ruin whatsoever they overtake.

The idea that the consequences of moral or immoral actions ultimately devolve upon those who commit them is conveyed in various ways throughout the Quran; see 2:272, which indicates that whatever one spends in charity is spent for oneself, and 10:108, where one is guided for the benefit of one’s soul and led astray only to its detriment, as well as 17:15; 27:40; 31:12; 39:41; 40:28; 45:15. That being virtuous, in particular, is ultimately for the sake of your own souls is also alluded to in the rhetorical question in 55:60: Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness? The other promise that comes to pass refers to the second time God sent a people against the Israelites (Z). Some reports connect this second set of events with the Jewish king Herod’s execution of John the Baptist (JJ,Ṭ) and thus consider it to refer to the time of the Roman occupation, which also saw the second destruction of the Jewish Temple, possibly alluded to by they will . . . enter the Temple as they entered it the first time. Although the second destruction of the Temple was carried out by the Romans, the destruction mentioned in this verse is associated by some commentators, anachronistically, with Nebuchadnezzar (JJ, Ṭ). The chronological discrepancy is noted by al-Rāzī, who suggests that interpreting the ultimate meaning of this passage should not be dependent upon knowing the specific details of Israelite history to which it alludes.

When this second period comes to pass, they—that is, those whom God will send against the Israelites—will make wretched their faces, meaning that the grief and distress that will befall the Israelites will show on their faces (R, Z). The face is usually considered a reflection of the soul and serves as its symbol in both positive and negative contexts in the Quran; see, for example, 2:112, where one submits his face to God; 3:106, where on the Day of Resurrection faces whiten and faces blacken in accordance with the fate of the souls; and 14:50, where those in Hell have the Fire covering their faces.
It may be that your Lord will have mercy upon you, but if you revert, We shall revert. And We have made Hell a prison for the disbelievers.

The Lord may have mercy upon the Israelites and remove the adversity visited upon them if they repent (R); according to some, to say that God may have mercy upon them means that He certainly did or will (Ṭ). But if they again revert to corruption, God will also revert, meaning that He will punish them again. That this pattern of Israelite disobedience and Divine Punishment would continue into the future is understood by some commentators to be implied in 7:167, referring to the Israelites: And when thy Lord proclaimed that He would surely send against them, till the Day of Resurrection, those who would inflict upon them a terrible punishment.

Hell is a prison for the disbelievers, because, in contrast to earthly punishment, which may change with time and which one may escape through death, the punishments of Hell are inescapable and surround the condemned on every side like a prison (R). Here prison translates ḥāṣīr, which may also mean a mat or cushion, thus ironically indicating that Hell is where the disbelievers will rest or repose; also see 2:206; 3:12, 197; 13:18; 38:56, where Hell is described as an evil resting place; and 7:41, where it is simply the resting place of arrogant disbelievers and wrongdoers.

Truly this Quran guides toward that which is most upright, and gives glad tidings to the believers who perform righteous deeds that theirs shall be a great reward,

and that We have prepared a painful punishment for those who believe not in the Hereafter.

That the Quran guides toward that which is most upright can mean that it guides to the truth or to religion (Ṭ). However, the Arabic pronoun rendered that which in that which is most upright is grammatically feminine, and thus some consider this to be a reference to the straight, or upright, path (ṭarīqah) or to the
upright religious community or creed (*millah*), since both are grammatically feminine (*Z*). The *great reward* is a reference to the paradisal Garden (*Ṭ*).

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11 Man prays for evil as he prays for good, and man is ever hasty.

11 *Man prays for evil as he prays for good* refers to situations where people pray in ignorance for what seems beneficial to them but will only bring them harm (*R*), or when they pray, in a moment of anger or passion, for what will bring harm to themselves, their families, or their property by way of curse or imprecation (*R*, *Ṭ*, *Z*). The implication is that if God were to respond to such requests, human beings would be destroyed by their own supplications (*Ṭ*). This behavior reflects that *man is ever hasty*, and throughout the Quran people *hasten unto disbelief* (5:41) and to *sin and enmity* (5:62); they *seek to hasten evil before good* (27:46) and seek to hasten their own destruction when they repeatedly ask their prophets when the punishments about which they have been warned will come to pass (*Z*; see, e.g., 6:57–58c; 8:32; 29:29). That being *hasty* is intrinsic to human nature is also indicated by 21:37, which says that *man was created of haste*. It is said that when God breathed His Spirit into Adam, He started from the head, and as the Spirit flowed downward, the clay became living flesh. Adam watched, impatient for the process to be completed, and sought to stand up before the Spirit reached his feet (*R*, *Ṭ*).

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12 We made the night and the day two signs. Then We effaced the sign of the night, and made the sign of the day, giving sight, that you might seek bounty from your Lord, and that you might know the number of years and the reckoning. And We have expounded everything in detail.

12 This is one of many verses to invoke *the night and the day* as two of God’s great signs to humanity (see, e.g., 2:164; 3:190; 6:96–97; 7:54; 10:6, 67; 13:3; 23:80; 24:44; 28:73; 30:23; 40:61). These are both signs of God’s Power and Beneficence, in that the night provides a time for repose (6:96) and the day a time for “seeking bounty.” The regular alternation between day and night also allows
people to know *the number of years* and “reckon” time; see also 6:96 and 10:5, where the reckoning of time is similarly facilitated by the cycles of the sun and moon. That God has *expounded* all things *in detail* means that He has explained them clearly (Ṭ) in the Quran; similarly described as *expounded* are God’s signs (6:97–98, 126; 7:133; 11:1; 41:3; 41:44) and His Book (7:52).

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13 And [for] every man We have fastened his omen upon his neck, and We shall bring it forth for him on the Day of Resurrection as a book he will meet wide open.

14 “Read your book! On this Day, your soul suffices as a reckoner against you.”

13–14 *Omen* here translates ṭāʾirah, a word that derives from the same root as that for “birds” (ṭayr), since the early Arabs, like certain other premodern societies, considered the movement and behavior of birds as indicators of impending good or bad fortune or as harbingers of the positive or negative consequences of a decision or action (R). That God has *fastened* a human being’s *omen upon his neck* is an image used to convey the idea that God has foreknowledge of a human being’s ultimate destiny and that from this perspective one’s destiny is as if sealed about one’s neck. The neck is singled out in particular, as it is said to be the site where tokens of either honor or shame are hung—for example, necklaces indicating high social status or honor, or chains or collars indicating servitude (R, Ṭ). Many commentators consider the *omen* upon one’s neck to represent one’s deeds in life, which, like an omen, portend either bliss or wretchedness in the Hereafter (IK, Q, Ṭ, Z). But many of these same commentators also take it as referring to the Divine Decree, or *qadar* (“measuring out”) for each individual.

Various traditions indicate that all human beings are born with a Divinely apportioned life span, material provision, and number of offspring as well as with the determination of their status in the Hereafter (Q, R, Ṭ). Both these traditions and the present verse can be read in a predestinarian vein to indicate that all moral destiny is foreordained, but they can also be understood simply as indicating that God has foreknowledge of an individual’s eventual moral choices and consequent fate; indeed, some suggest that the *omen* may refer to individual moral responsibility itself (*taklīf*), meaning that no human being can escape the responsibility to live according to God’s Law and follow His commands (Q).
Here as elsewhere, the collected record of one’s deeds in life is described as a book that one will encounter on the Day of Judgment (cf. 17:71; 18:49; 69:19–25; 84:7–10). That an individual’s book is wide open indicates that its contents are well known to the individual as well as to God, and although some of the deeds and their repercussions may have remained hidden in earthly life, they will become fully manifest in the Hereafter. The recording of deeds is often ascribed to two angels assigned to every individual, one recording good deeds and the other evil deeds (IK, R; see commentary on 82:10–12). Al-Rāzī, however, describes the spiritual reality of this recording metaphorically, suggesting that every deed one commits in life is like a drop of water that, no matter how small, leaves some small impression upon the “rock” that is the substance of the soul. Thus each deed—and especially repeated or habitual behaviors—eventually has a part in inscribing the destiny of each individual upon the soul.

It is God, perhaps speaking through the voice of the angels (R), who issues the command in v. 14, Read your book! In reading one’s own book, one effectively renders judgment upon oneself; since the book is composed solely of one’s own deeds, all individuals can be said to be able to judge as to whether they deserve to enter the Garden or the Fire by “reading” their own actions. Although the effect of Divine Mercy on individual salvation remains imponderable and a source of hope, it can be said that human beings are saved or condemned through their own actions. For this reason, the Quran repeatedly states that God does not wrong people; rather, it is they who wrong themselves (e.g., 3:117; 10:44; 29:40). In this way, one’s soul suffices as a reckoner, and the Quran offers elsewhere the powerful image of one’s own limbs testifying against one on the Day of Judgment (24:24; 36:65; 41:20–22). This book can thus be understood as referring to one’s very soul, inscribed with its deeds in life. Some describe the book in this way, “Your tongue is its pen, your saliva is its ink, and your limbs are the paper upon which it is written; it is you who dictates [it] to your own memory” (Q).

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Whosoever is rightly guided is only rightly guided for the sake of his own soul, and whosoever is astray is only astray to its detriment. None shall bear the burden of another. And never do We punish till We have sent a messenger.

This verse brings together three themes commonly invoked throughout the Quran, including the related ideas that the consequences of one’s moral actions and
one’s state of guidance or misguidance ultimately devolve upon oneself (see 16:7c) and that no one assumes the burden of another. This means that no one is punished for the misdeeds of another, but all must bear the consequences of their own actions (see 6:164; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38). Although some may lead others astray, the burden of the sins committed by those who were thus misguided is still borne by themselves, although some verses indicate that those who mislead bear an additional burden (cf. 7:38; 16:25; 37:32–33). That God does not punish a people without warning, identified here specifically with His sending a messenger, is mentioned elsewhere (26:208; 28:59); see also 6:131, which states that God would never destroy towns for their wrongdoing while their people were heedless, meaning before a messenger had made them aware of their wrongdoing and its destructive consequences (see 6:131c).

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16 And when We desire to destroy a town, We command those who live a life of luxury within it; yet they commit iniquity therein. Thus the Word comes due against it and We annihilate it completely.

16 Throughout the Quran, it is mentioned that it is often the privileged members of a community—its leaders and those who enjoy high social status—who are most resistant to the warnings of the prophets and most likely to be disbelievers (see 6:123c; 7:60–62c; 23:33–38; 34:34–35; 43:23). We command those who live a life of luxury is understood by most commentators to mean that God commands such people to belief and obedience (JJ, R, Ṭ, Ṭs), but that they disobey and commit iniquity. According to al-Rāzī, when We desire to destroy a town means when the time draws near for the destruction of a town whose fate is already known to God. At that time, God commands those who live a life of luxury within it, knowing that they will disobey. The disobedience and disbelief of people of privilege is in some ways the least excusable because of the many blessings they have been given, although the attractions of the world may be greater for such people and they may face greater temptation. Al-Zamakhsharī understands the verse to mean that God commands those who live a life of luxury to disobey and to commit iniquity. However, al-Zamakhsharī understands this to be a metaphorical statement, meaning that in giving such people the means and power to disobey and lead others astray, it is as if He has commanded them to iniquity, for, as al-Zamakhsharī and others point out, the Quran clearly states that God does not command indecency (7:28). Some have read the verbal phrase amarnā, We
command, as ammarnā, meaning that God places those who live a life of luxury in positions of authority (R, T). That the Word comes due for a town or a people indicates that their period of respite has elapsed and the threatened Divine Punishment is imminent (cf. 10:96; 28:63; 32:13; 36:7, 70; 37:3; 39:19; 40:6; 41:25; 46:18). In some of the foregoing cases, Word translates kalimah, although here and elsewhere it translates qawl. That the town is subsequently “annihilated completely” means that it is utterly destroyed and uprooted from its very foundations (R).

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17 How many a generation have We destroyed after Noah! Thy Lord suffices as One Aware of the sins of His servants, Seeing.

17 In Islamic sacred history, Noah is the first in a series of prophets whose peoples were destroyed for rejecting the message of repentance and tawḥīd (God’s Oneness) brought by these prophets; see, for example, 7:59–136; 7:59c. The Quran repeatedly invokes as signs to be heeded the towns, peoples, and generations destroyed for their wrongdoing, often with phrasing similar to this verse (see, e.g., 6:6; 7:4; 19:74; 20:128; 21:11; 22:45).

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18 Whosoever would desire the ephemeral, We hasten for him therein whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire. Then We appointed Hell for him, wherein he shall burn, blameworthy, banished.

19 And whosoever desires the Hereafter, and endeavors for it earnestly, and is a believer, it is they whose efforts shall be appreciated.

18–19 This verse indicates that, for those who seek only worldly things while denying or despairing of the rewards of the Hereafter, God may hasten for them precisely what they desire; that is, He may grant them worldly goods in the here and now, but with the caveat whatsoever We will for whomsoever We desire, for the
matter is controlled by Divine rather than human will. He then “appoints Hell” for them in the Hereafter. However, the efforts of those whose desire and endeavor are for the Hereafter are appreciated by God, and God’s appreciation (lit. “thankfulness”) for their deeds is the reward He grants them in the Hereafter (ﺘ); cf. 2:200–201; 3:145.

This verse is an important basis for the Islamic doctrine that deeds are judged according to their intentions (R), since here one is rewarded for desiring and earnestly endeavoring for the good, as a believer, without mention of the success or completion of all of one’s endeavors (Z). This verse can be said to set three conditions for attaining reward for a good deed: one must intend goodness by it; one must make an earnest attempt to complete the deed; and one must do so in the context of being a believer (R). Those who desire the ephemeral in v. 18 may include not only those whose worldly desires lead them to outwardly sinful behavior, but also those who perform seemingly pious and virtuous acts, but only for worldly benefit or hypocritically (Z). In this vein, the Prophet said in a famous ḥadīth, “Deeds are only according to intentions, and verily each shall have what he intended. Whosoever emigrated [to Madinah] for God and His Prophet, his emigration is for God and His Prophet. Whosoever emigrated to attain worldly benefit or to marry a woman, his emigration is for that for which he emigrated” (Z). Having emigrated for a worldly rather than spiritual purpose, one may attain that worldly desire, but will not be rewarded for this emigration in the Hereafter.

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20 Each do We aid—both these and those—with the Gift of thy Lord; and the Gift of thy Lord is not confined.

21 Observe how We have favored some of them over others, and surely the Hereafter is greater in ranking and greater in favor.

20–21 God aids both those who desire the ephemeral (v. 18) and whosoever desires the Hereafter (v. 19), for God’s Gift, meaning earthly provision, is not confined to one group or the other. That He favored some of them over others (see 4:34) in earthly life may indicate that whosoever desires the Hereafter have been given the greater gift, namely, sound judgment, which is more valuable than the “ephemeral things” desired by others (ﺘ). It might also simply indicate that God gives and withholds provision in different degrees among both believers and disbelievers (R). Al-Rāzī observes that the Divine purpose behind such differences
in earthly provision is elucidated in 43:32: We have apportioned for them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in rank, that some of them may take others into service; and in 6:165: He it is Who appointed you vicegerents upon the earth and raised some of you by degrees above others, that He may try you in that which He has given you. But the ranking and favor will be even greater—that is, far more pronounced and clear—in the Hereafter, as the guided and the misguided will be separated into the people of the Garden and the people of the Fire, respectively (R).

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22 Do not set up another god along with God, lest you sit blameworthy, forsaken.

22 This is one of many repeated Quranic warnings against “setting up” partners (e.g., 3:151; 4:48; 13:16), equals (e.g., 2:22; 14:30; 41:9), or other gods along with God, that is, establishing them as objects of worship (see also 15:95–96; 17:39; 50:26).

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23 Thy Lord decrees that you worship none but Him, and be virtuous to parents. Whether one or both of them reaches old age, say not to them “Uff!” nor chide them, but speak unto them a noble word.

23 For other verses in which the imperative to worship God is paired with a command to be good to parents, see 2:83; 4:36c; 6:151; 31:13–14. That the Lord decrees that you worship none but Him can mean that He commands it (T) or that in an ultimate sense nothing is worshipped other than God, as in 13:15: And unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and on the earth, willingly or unwillingly, as do their shadows in the morning and the evening; and v. 44: The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise.

This verse specifically counsels respect for parents as they age. Uff! can be an expression of complaint or annoyance, and the implication here is that one should be tolerant and patient with parents and their needs and dependencies, just as they
were patient with one as a child (R, Ṭ, Z). More specifically, *uff* can refer to something that is filthy or soiling (R, Ṭ), and some thus suggest that the verse is addressing the irritation a son or daughter might feel in having to assist elderly parents with personal hygiene (Ṭ). The prohibition against saying *Uff!* to one’s parents may also be meant to discourage the use of any kind of ugly, harsh, or dismissive expression with them (Ṭ). To *chide them* (*tanharhumā*) may also mean to rebuff them or turn away from them in anger.

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24 Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, “My Lord! Have mercy upon them, as they raised me when I was small.”

24 To *lower . . . the wing of humility out of mercy* expresses the abundance of mercy, affection, and humility with which children should treat their parents. A child’s showing mercy to parents and praying that God will have mercy upon them are a fitting recompense for the mercy they showed the child when he or she was young (Z). Moreover, even if one’s parents are disbelievers, one should still pray for God’s Mercy upon them, asking particularly that He give them guidance (Z). In connection with this verse, al-Zamakhsharī cites the *ḥadīth*: “The Contentment of God lies in the contentment of parents; and the Anger of God lies in the anger of parents.”

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25 Your Lord knows best that which is in your souls. If you are righteous, then verily He is Forgiving toward the penitent.

25 That God knows what is in souls is also mentioned in 2:234 and 11:31. Similarly, He is said to know what lies within breasts (see, e.g., 3:154; 5:7; 11:5; 29:10) and in hearts (4:63; 33:51).

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26 Give unto the kinsman his right, and unto the indigent
and the traveler, but do not squander wastefully.

27 Truly the wasteful are the brethren of satans, and Satan is ungrateful to his Lord.

26–27 For a very similar verse, see 30:38; see also 2:83, 177, 215; 4:36; 8:41; 24:22. In 59:7 one is similarly enjoined to be charitable or kind to, among others, relatives, the indigent, and travelers. To give unto the kinsman his right may mean to maintain good relations with one’s kin and to visit them often (Ṭ, Z), since maintaining kinship relations (ṣilat al-raḥim) is an important principle in Islamic ethics. A report attributed to ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn (d. 92/711), the pious great-grandson of the Prophet and the fourth Shiite Imam, understands kinsman here to refer specifically to the kin of the Prophet Muhammad, meaning that they should be given their specially allotted share of bounties and spoils (Q, Ṭ, Ṭs), since they were forbidden from receiving other forms of charity. To give unto . . . the traveler may mean to provide travelers with food or accommodation (Ṭ). But one should not squander such charity wastefully by being excessive in one’s giving (Q, Ṭ, Z), perhaps in the interests of pride or enhancing one’s reputation or by giving it to those who do not need it rather than to those who have a moral claim upon one’s charity (Q, Ṭ), that is, relatives, the poor, and travelers, among other groups (such as orphans) mentioned elsewhere (see 2:177). Wastefulness or prodigality is to be avoided in charity as in all things (see, e.g., 7:31), for God loves not the prodigal (6:141). In charitable giving, then, one should strike a balance between being “wasteful” and being “miserly” (see v. 29; 25:67). Those who are wasteful are the brethren of satans, meaning that they are their friends and supporters (Ṭ).

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28 But if thou turnest away from them, seeking a mercy from thy Lord, for which thou dost hope, then speak unto them a gentle word.

28 Vv. 28–30 are addressed to the Prophet, but the injunctions they contain apply to all believers. Here, the verse instructs the Prophet regarding situations in which he must “turn away” from someone seeking his charity, because he does not have the means to provide what is being requested. Seeking a mercy from thy Lord may be an expression referring to the state of temporary poverty that prevents the Prophet from fulfilling such a request (R). In this context, to call poverty a state of
seeking a mercy from God suggests both the temporary nature of the Prophet’s state of need and his hope and trust that God will eventually grant him the mercy, that is, the provision (Ṭ, Z) he needs—for the Prophet anticipates that this mercy will come.

It is reported that when the Prophet was asked for charity that he could not provide, he would remain silent while the provision was not available, preferring to await the necessary provision rather than refuse the request (Q). Instead of remaining silent, however, the Prophet is here instructed to speak unto them—that is, the petitioners—a gentle word, explaining that he cannot fulfill their need at the moment because of a lack of means (R), but encouraging and promising them that provision from God shall come (Ṭ). Speak unto them a gentle word may also be understood to mean “speak for them gentle words,” indicating that the Prophet should supplicate God on their behalf to grant them the needed provision (Q). An alternate interpretation explains that this verse was revealed after the Prophet refused to grant the requested charity to a group of people whom he knew would use the funds to engage in corruption. In denying them, the Prophet was seeking a mercy from God for thwarting any corruption they had intended (Q).

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And let not thine hand be shackled to thy neck; nor let it be entirely open, lest thou shouldst sit condemned, destitute.

That thine hand be shackled to thy neck is a metaphorical reference to miserliness, which is also condemned elsewhere in the Quran; see 47:38: And whosoever is miserly is only miserly toward himself; God is the Rich, and you are the poor; as well as 3:180; 4:37; 9:76; 57:24. But even in matters of charity, one’s hand should also not be entirely open, referring to an excessive and thus irresponsible generosity, which may well leave one devoid of the means to provide for oneself. This is one of several Quranic passages that indicates the importance of moderation in all things and avoiding the extremes of miserliness and prodigality (see vv. 26–27); see also 25:67. Miserliness will render one condemned by those to whom one has refused charity (IK, Ṭ), while prodigality renders one liable to condemnation from oneself and others, as well as from God, for depleting one’s wealth so quickly (Ṭ), rendering oneself destitute through foolish excess (Z). Destitute translates maḥṣūr, which can also mean “exhausted” or “depleted” (R, Ṭ, Z).

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Truly thy Lord outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will. Verily of His servants He is Aware, Seeing.

That God outspreads and straitens provision for whomsoever He will (cf. 13:26; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 34:36, 39; 39:52; 42:12) indicates that God controls all earthly provision, an idea also found in a well-known ḥadīth from the Prophet that includes earthly provision among the things decreed by God for each individual. Outspreads translates yabsuṭu, and this action, attributed to God here and elsewhere, is derived from the same root as the Divine Name al-Bāṣīṭ, the Open-Handed. Although the Name al-Bāṣīṭ as such does not appear in the Quran, this quality of Divine Open-handedness is also reflected in 5:64: The Jews say, “God’s Hand is shackled.” Shackled are their hands, and they are cursed for what they say. Nay, but His two Hands are outstretched (mabsūṭatān, derived from the same root as al-Bāṣīṭ).

And slay not your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you. Surely their slaying is a great sin.

And approach not adultery; verily it is indecency and an evil way.

And slay not the soul that God has made inviolable, save by right. And whosoever is slain unjustly, We have appointed authority unto his heir. Then let him not be excessive in slaying. Verily he shall be helped.

A similar list of injunctions against slaying one’s children, committing adultery (or “indecency” in 6:151), and slaying innocent souls is found in 6:151; see 6:151–52c. As for the slaying of one’s children, it was reportedly a common practice in parts of pre-Islamic Arabia to kill infant girls immediately after birth for fear of the shame or liability they might bring to the family (cf. 81:8–9c). Here and in 6:151, the prohibition against slaying one’s children out of fear of poverty is
followed by the assurance of God’s Provision. Warnings about the evil of and
punishment for fornication or adultery (often referred to as “indecency”) are also
found in 4:15, 24–25; 6:151; 24:2–3; 25:68; 33:30. In 60:12, a promise not to slay
one’s children or commit adultery is part of a pledge taken by women seeking to
join the Prophet’s community at Madinah.

The warning against slaying souls that God has made inviolable—that is, innocent souls—is also found in 6:151 and 25:68; see also 4:29, 92–93; 5:32. The exception save by right refers to cases where the Quran warrants slaying as a punishment for a capital transgression, such as for murder or “waging war against God and His Messenger” (5:33). In the case of one who is slained unjustly, meaning without right or just cause, God has appointed authority (sultān) unto his heir (walīhi)—that is, to the relative close enough to the deceased to be responsible for claiming retribution for the death (Z)—to demand the execution of the murderer as retaliation, to pardon the murderer, or to accept the wergild (IK, Q, T). This verse was invoked by Amr ibn al-Āṣ (d. 43/664) at the arbitration (37/658) that took place after the Battle of Siffin (37/657) as part of his argument that Muʿāwiya ibn Abī Sufyān (then the governor of Syria) had the right to assume the caliphate. Amr’s argument was that Muʿāwiya, as the walī (in the sense of a near male relative) of his “unjustly slain” cousin, the third Caliph, Uthmān ibn Abī Sufyān, should be granted sultān, meaning political authority (IK).

Some commentators indicate that only a male heir (walī) can exercise this authority, but others disagree. Here heir translates walī, which can also mean “protector,” and thus some cite 9:71, But the believing men and believing women are protectors (awliyā’; sing. walī) of one another, as evidence that female heirs and next of kin might also be granted such authority (Q). The warning against being excessive in slaying is understood to mean that only the actual murderer is subject to the death penalty, and the retaliation must not extend beyond the perpetrator of the crime; this was meant to prevent the extended blood feuds that were often generated by such crimes in pre-Islamic Arabia (T); see 2:178c; 2:194; 5:45c. It is also understood to mean that the murderer should not be tortured, maimed, or mutilated before execution (Q). Verily he shall be helped most likely refers to the heir of the slain individual (Q, T), although some suggest it is the slain individual who is helped (T).

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34 And approach not the orphan’s property, save in the most virtuous manner, till he reaches maturity. And fulfill the pact; surely the pact is called to account.
34  The injunction to *approach not the orphan’s property . . . till he reaches maturity* means that the guardian of an orphan is not entitled to take the property belonging to the orphan through inheritance or otherwise. Moreover, the guardian is responsible for maintaining the orphan’s property and returning it when the orphan reaches maturity. *Save in the most virtuous manner* may refer to certain exceptions made with regard to the guardian’s use of an orphan’s property. For example, in cases where the orphan’s property is in the form of land or riding animals, the guardian might temporarily use this property as long as it is maintained and not depleted thereby; and indigent guardians might use or borrow an orphan’s property to the extent that it is absolutely needed. The orphan’s property can also be used or exchanged by the guardian if it is done in order to improve or increase the value of the orphan’s inheritance (see 6:151; see also commentary on 2:220; 4:2, 6, 10). The Quran repeatedly enjoins the fulfilling of pacts, covenants, and vows both to God and to others; see for example, 2:40; 3:76; 5:1; 6:152; 13:20; 16:91; 48:10; 33:15c.

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35  And give full measure when you measure, and weigh with the straight balance. That is better and more virtuous in the end.

35  *To give full measure when you measure* and to *weigh with the straight balance* mean to measure honestly, rather than cheating people when trading goods and currency by using a balance that falsely overstates or understates the weight of what has been placed upon it. It also means, in a general way, to barter or exchange goods fairly and honestly, so that what is given is equal to what is received. For similar injunctions, see 6:151–52c; 7:85; 11:84–85; 26:181–82; 55:8–9; 83:1–3c.

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36  And pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge. Truly hearing, and sight, and the heart—all of these will be called to account.

36  *Pursue not that whereof you have no knowledge* can mean that one should not speak of things about which one does not have proper knowledge or falsely claim to have knowledge about something that one does not in fact have (R, T). The verse can thus be understood as alluding to any type of false or unjust testimony (R,
One should not pursue, in the sense of investigating, private matters in order to expose the faults of others. In this context in which a series of moral injunctions are given regarding the treatment of others, the verse may be interpreted to mean more specifically that one should not level accusations or charges against others concerning affairs about which one does not have sufficient knowledge, in effect slandering them (R, Ṭ); see, for example, 24:15, which criticizes those who pass along false rumors about the sexual transgressions of another: *When you accepted it with your tongues, and spoke with your mouths that whereof you had no knowledge, supposing it to be insignificant, though it is great in the Eyes of God.*

_Pursue not_ can also be rendered simply “Follow not,” indicating that one should not follow a path or a guide without knowing whether one will be led or misled; the verse can thus be read as supporting the traditional Islamic discouragement of _taqlīd_ (Z), the blind imitation or following of another in matters of theology (although not in matters of law, which always requires some degree of following the _Sunnah_ and, for those who are not jurisprudents themselves, following the legal rulings of others). In fact, some suggested that this verse meant, with regard to legal rulings, that one should not make judgments based on speculation, even through the process of analogical reasoning (_qiyās_), though others argued that various legal determinations, such as estimating the direction of the _qiblah_ or issuing a nonbinding legal opinion (_fatwā_), necessarily entail some level of speculation (R).

The human faculties of _hearing, and sight, and the heart_ are frequently invoked in the Quran, as they are understood to be three means by which people are guided to truth; the _heart_ is traditionally considered the seat of understanding as well as faith; see 2:7c. The three faculties are thus mentioned as gifts for which people should be grateful (see 16:78; 23:78; 32:9c; 67:23), but also as faculties that can be “removed,” “sealed,” or otherwise rendered ineffective by God as a punishment for wrongdoing or disbelief (2:7; 6:46; 16:108; 45:23; 46:26). Thus these three faculties _will be called to account_, meaning that one will be held accountable for their proper or improper use (R, Ṭs). The verse may also be read to mean that the faculties of hearing, sight, and the heart will themselves be questioned (R, Ṭs). This would be similar to other verses where one’s limbs and one’s skin are said to testify about and even against one in the Day of Judgment (Ṫ; cf. 24:24; 41:20–22).

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And walk not exultantly upon the earth; surely thou shalt not penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height.
That one should walk not exultantly upon the earth (cf. 31:18) means that one should be humble and moderate in one’s demeanor (see 31:19c), rather than acting in a boastful or arrogant manner, for God loves not one who is a vainglorious boaster (4:36; cf. 31:18; 57:23). This can also be understood as a moral guideline addressed to all human beings, instructing them not to act triumphantly toward other creatures. In contrast to those who would assume such an arrogant demeanor, the servants of the Compassionate . . . walk humbly upon the earth (25:63). A famous report of the Prophet’s appearance and demeanor, composed by ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, describes the Prophet as walking energetically, but never proudly (al-Ṭabarī, Taʾrīkh). That neither the Prophet nor anyone else shall penetrate the earth, nor reach the mountains in height is meant symbolically to remind human beings of their own weakness and powerlessness, surrounded as they are by vast phenomena that demonstrate, by contrast, their own smallness. Human beings thus have no reason to assume their own greatness or behave arrogantly or boastfully (R).

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The evil of all this is loathsome unto thy Lord.

That is from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee. Do not set up another god along with God, lest thou be cast into Hell, condemned, banished.

The evil of all this in v. 38 refers to the series of sinful behaviors warned against in vv. 31–37. That in v. 39 refers more broadly to all of the moral injunctions and prohibitions mentioned in vv. 22–39 (R, Z), which are from the wisdom thy Lord has revealed unto thee, that is, Muhammad, through the Quran. V. 22 begins this section with an exhortation to not set up another god along with God, and v. 39 closes it with the identical admonition, because, according to al-Zamakhsharī, knowledge of the Oneness of God (tawḥīd) is the beginning and foundation of all wisdom. The inherent virtue of the various moral guidelines set out in vv. 22–39 is self-evident to the intellect, according to al-Rāzī, and as such these moral guidelines are found in all religions and creeds and are never subject to abrogation by later revelations. One report specifically mentions that all of these injunctions were found in the tablets of the Torah given to Moses (R, Ṭ).

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Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females from among the angels [for Himself]? Surely you speak a monstrous word!

This is one of several passages that mocks the pre-Islamic belief among the Quraysh that the angels were female and that they were the daughters of God; see also 4:117; 16:57–59; 37:149–53; 43:16–19; 52:39; 53:19–21, 27. Here and elsewhere, the belief that God had daughters is juxtaposed with the extremely low regard the pre-Islamic Arabs reportedly held for daughters in general—the birth of a daughter brought shame and anguish to a family. Thus the rhetorical question Did your Lord favor you with sons, while He took females? is meant to reveal the foolishness of such a belief (cf. 53:21), which is described as a monstrous word. Monstrous translates ʿazīm, which also means “great” or “tremendous,” but here in a negative context can be translated “monstrous” or “terrible.” Such a belief is monstrous, because attributing to God what they would consider a misfortune and a disgrace for themselves reveals the pre-Islamic Arabs’ profound lack of reverence for God and His Power.

And We have indeed varied [Our signs] in this Quran, that they might reflect, though it increased them in naught but aversion.

That God varies His signs (6:46, 65, 105; 7:58; 46:27) or elsewhere His parables (17:89; 18:54) in the Quran means that He presents them in varying ways (R): sometimes through rational proofs, sometimes in an awesome manner inspiring fear, and sometimes in a gentle manner that attracts listeners (Bḍ on 6:46). The purpose of the Quran’s multifarious presentation is so that they—that is, its listeners or readers—might reflect upon these truths and signs and come to a greater understanding of them. That it increased them in naught but aversion means that it did so for some, which is consistent with other verses of the Quran that describe the wide range of responses among people to hearing and seeing the revelations and signs of God. See, for example, 2:26, where God’s parables guide some and mislead others; 9:124–25, where every sūrah increases some in faith, but is the cause of spiritual defilement for others; and v. 82, where what is sent down of the Quran is a cure and a mercy for the believers, but increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss. Disbelievers are also increased in naught but
**aversion** by the words of the prophets in 17:46; 25:60; 35:42. Those who are increased in naught but aversion in this verse might also be presumed to be disbelievers and wrongdoers (IK). Muʿtazilite theologians argued that this verse indicates that God wills for all to understand His message, since He displays His signs in various ways precisely to encourage different types of people to reflect; but some Ashʿarite theologians adduce this verse to show the opposite, namely, that God wills to turn certain people away from the truth, since He revealed His signs knowing that they would increase some people in naught but aversion (R).

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Say, “If there were gods with Him, as they say, they would surely seek a way unto the Possessor of the Throne.”

42 The Prophet is instructed to challenge the idolaters’ belief in multiple gods by asserting that if there were other gods besides God, they would surely seek a way unto the Possessor of the Throne, that is, the One God. In other words, if there were multiple gods, they would all vie with one another for a way to dethrone the Possessor of the Throne and struggle with Him for dominance (JJ, Q, R, Z) thereby creating chaos; for a similar idea, see 21:22: Were there gods other than God in them (i.e., in the heavens and on the earth), they (the heavens and the earth) would surely have been corrupted. So glory be to God, Lord of the Throne, above that which they ascribe. See also 23:91.

Alternately, the present verse can also be interpreted to mean that these other gods, were they to exist, would seek a way unto the One God in order to come near Him and ingratiate themselves with Him, being aware of His Dominance over them (IK, Q, R, Z). If we juxtapose this verse with 39:3, where the idolaters claim to worship other gods as a means of approaching the One God, this verse might seem to respond to their claim by suggesting, “If there were other gods, would they not seek a way to approach the One God on their own behalf, rather than simply as intermediaries for the idolaters?” This hypothetical situation is meant to demonstrate that there can be only one God, and that whatever one might claim as an object of worship other than God, to the extent it exists at all, is itself dependent on the One God and so cannot rightly be called a “god” in any true sense.

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Glory be to Him! Exalted is He above whatsoever they say.
43 *Glory be to Him* (or *Glory be to God*) frequently follows the mention of false deities, or of sons and daughters attributed to God, as it does here. In such contexts, this exclamation is often followed by a statement of God’s being exalted above the “partners” the idolaters ascribe to Him or above all false claims and descriptions regarding Him; see 6:100; 10:18; 16:1; 21:22; 23:91; 28:68; 30:40; 37:159, 180; 39:67; 43:82; 52:43; 59:23.

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44 The seven heavens, and the earth, and whosoever is in them glorify Him. And there is no thing, save that it hymns His praise, though you do not understand their praise. Truly He is Clement, Forgiving.

44 This is one of several verses indicating that God is worshipped by all creatures in existence—both those on earth and those in heaven, angels as well as beasts, and even inanimate creatures—as these are variously described as praising or prostrating to God. See, for example, 13:13: *And the thunder hymns His praise, as do the angels, in awe of Him. He sends forth the thunderbolts and strikes therewith whomsoever He will. Yet they dispute concerning God, and He is severe in wrath;* and 22:18: *Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, and the beasts, and many among mankind?* See also 13:15; 16:49–50. The present verse can be read as continuing the idea in v. 42 that all things are ultimately subordinate to the One God, Who created them, and correspondingly turn toward Him, *willingly or unwillingly* (13:15). Thus to consider created things to be objects of worship themselves, even as intermediaries, is to be ignorant of the complete and utter dependence of all things on their Creator. See 41:37: *Among His signs are the night and the day, the sun and the moon. Prostrate not unto the sun, nor unto the moon. Prostrate unto God, Who created them, if it is He Whom you worship.* It is the contingency of all these phenomena that points to the existence of the one uncreated Creator, who is necessary in Himself (Bḍ).

Although this universal praise for God transcends human understanding—*you do not understand their praise*—some have considered *Glory be to Him* (as in v. 43) to be the universal prayer of all creatures (Ṭ). Some commentators have suggested that one should never show disrespect to any animal, or indeed to any creature, for they too are possessed of spirit and praise God (Ṭ). God is *Clement*, in that He does not bring punishment down upon wrongdoers immediately (Bḍ), and
Forgiving of those who seek His Forgiveness; these two Divine Names are also paired in 2:225, 235; 3:155; 5:101; 35:41.

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45 And when thou recitest the Quran, We place a hidden veil between thee and those who believe not in the Hereafter.

45 This verse is addressed to the Prophet. That God places a hidden veil between the Prophet and the disbelievers when he recites the Quran means either that there is a barrier preventing the disbelievers from comprehending the words he is reciting (cf. v. 46), and hence from deriving guidance or spiritual benefit from them (Ṭ), or that the barrier is there to protect the Prophet against harassment or harm from the disbelievers (JJ, R); also see 41:5c. According to al-Rāzī, the hidden veil in this verse, like the “seals” that God places on hearing and hearts elsewhere (e.g., 2:7; 7:101; 9:87), is meant to prevent disbelievers and wrongdoers from understanding the revelation and deriving guidance from it.

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46 And We have placed coverings over their hearts, such that they understand it not, and in their ears a deafness. And whenever thou dost mention thy Lord alone in the Quran, they turn their backs in aversion.

46 This verse offers a description similar to that of the hidden veil placed between the disbelievers and the Prophet in v. 45 and to the “seals” placed on hearts and hearing in 2:7; 7:101; 9:87; and elsewhere. An identical description of the coverings placed on their hearts and the deafness in their ears can be found in 6:25 and 18:57. See 6:25c and also 41:5, where the disbelievers themselves say, Our hearts are under coverings from that to which you call us, and in our ears there is deafness, and between us and you there is a veil. To mention thy Lord alone in the Quran refers to the Prophet’s reciting verses from the Quran that explicitly mention God’s Oneness and refute the idea that He has partners or associates (Bḍ, R).
We know best that which they listen for when they listen to thee, and when they converse in secret, when the wrongdoers say, “You follow naught but a man bewitched!”

Look how they set forth descriptions of thee. Thus they go astray and cannot find a way.

47–48 When the disbelievers listen to the Prophet, that which they listen for is not guidance, but rather an opportunity to mock and deny the Prophet and the Quranic message (Bḍ, R, Z). God also knows what they say when they converse in secret. “Secret converse” is mentioned in several verses as having mostly nefarious purposes; see commentary on 4:114: There is no good in most of their secret converse, save for him who enjoins charity or kindness or reconciliation between men; as well as commentary on 58:7–10. The wrongdoers’ accusation that Muhammad is bewitched (also 25:8), or deceived by sorcery (R), is a more passive version of the disbelievers’ claim that Muhammad and other prophets are active purveyors of manifest sorcery, as mentioned in 5:110; 6:7; 10:76, 81; 11:7; 20:57; 21:3; 26:35; 27:13; 28:36; 34:43; 37:15; 43:30; 46:7; 54:2; 61:6; 74:24. Other prophets are also called bewitched: Ṣāliḥ (26:153), Shu‘ayb (26:185), Moses (17:101), and the messengers generally (15:15). The descriptions they set forth for Muhammad in v. 48 is a reference to their calling him bewitched in v. 47 and their dismissing him elsewhere as merely a poet (21:5; 37:36; 52:30) or possessed (15:6; 23:70; 34:8; 44:14; 68:51; R, Q, Z).

They say, “What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?”

Say, “Be you of stone, or of iron,

or some other created thing more difficult [to resurrect] to your minds.” Then they will say, “Who will bring us back?” Say, “He Who originated you the first time.” And
they will shake their heads at thee and say, “When will it be?” Say, “It may well be nigh.”

49–51 These three verses include a set of skeptical questions about the Resurrection and Judgment that the disbelievers put forth in other verses as well. The first question demonstrates the disbelievers incredulity at the idea that the dead matter of bones and dust can be given life anew (cf. 17:98; 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16–17; 56:47; 79:10–11). The response, indicating that God could give life even to stone or iron, is meant to suggest that it should not be so difficult for the disbelievers to conceive of such a powerful God giving bones new life since, unlike stone and iron, bones were once endowed with life by Him and can simply be returned to that state (Z). Their second question asks who has the power to do such a thing (cf. 36:78), and the answer is the God Who created them the first time, implying that since they acknowledge that God had created them once, they have no reason to doubt His ability to do so again (cf. 36:79). That the resurrection of human beings will be similar to God’s creation of them the first time is also mentioned in 6:94 and 18:48. God’s power to resurrect implies His total power over death; in connection with this verse some commentators mention a hadīth that says that on the Day of Resurrection death will be brought forth in the form of a beautiful ram and will then be slaughtered between Paradise and Hell (IK, Q).

The third question in this passage asks when the Resurrection will come about (cf. 10:48; 21:38; 27:21; 32:28; 34:29; 36:48; 67:25). The Prophet elsewhere is told to reply to similar questions by saying that he has no knowledge of the coming of the Hour (21:109; 67:26; 72:25), but here he is told to say, by way of further warning, that it may well be nigh (cf. 27:72). This is understood by some to mean that it is indeed near at hand, for, according to commentators, when the phrase it may well be is spoken by God, it indicates something that is necessarily the case, not something that is merely possible (Q, Ṭ). According to a hadīth, the Prophet said, “I and the Hour have been sent [as close together] as these two,” and he raised his index and middle finger to demonstrate (Ṭ).

The Day when He calls you, you will respond by praising Him, and you will think that you tarried but a short while.

52 The Day when He calls you—that is, when God summons everyone collectively from the grave on the Day of Resurrection—the response of all will be
to praise God (cf. 39:75). This universal praise is the result of human beings’ now inescapable recognition of God as their Creator (Q), His power to resurrect them (Q), and the many blessings He has bestowed upon them (Ṭs). Their praise is also a way of demonstrating their complete obedience to God’s Command (IK, Ṭ) and their full submission to the process of Resurrection and Judgment (Z). However, the recognition and obedience after death of those who refused to recognize and obey God in earthly life bring them no benefit (Q, R, Ṭs). On that day, one’s earthly life will seem to have been brief, as if one had tarried in earthly life or perhaps in the grave (Bḍ) for but a short while. Elsewhere, the Quran says more specifically that those who are resurrected will think that they had tarried for a day or part of a day (18:19; 23:113; cf. 20:104; 79:46) or for merely an hour of a day (10:45; 30:55; 46:35). In all respects, earthly life will seem utterly transient and contemptible in the face of the Hereafter (Z).

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53 Say unto My servants that they should say that which is more virtuous. Surely Satan provokes ill feeling between them. Surely Satan is a manifest enemy unto man.

53 My servants likely refers to the believers specifically (R, Z), but may also refer to all human beings (Q, Ṭs). Say that which is more virtuous may be a general injunction to speak gently, without harshness (Z); see also 2:83; 4:5, 8–9; 6:152; 16:125; 17:23, 28; 29:46; 33:70. Because speaking harshly will only encourage one’s opponents to do likewise (see 6:108) and may further entrench them in their opposition (R), one should rather respond to the insults of disbelievers with words such as, “May God have Mercy upon you!” (Q). In this vein, some reports indicate that the verse was revealed regarding an incident in which the prominent Companion and second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d. 22/644), was insulted by an Arab, whom he then cursed or threatened in return (Mw, Q, W). This verse was revealed indicating that he should pardon the man instead (W).

Since that which is more virtuous is in the feminine form, some suggest that there is an elided feminine noun that this phrase describes; the most common suggestion is kalimah (“word”), so that the verse would could be rendered, “Say [the word] which is more virtuous” (Q, Ṭs). The “word” in this case may be identified with the Islamic testimony of faith, “There is no god but God, and Muhammad is the Messenger of God” (Ṭs), which is sometimes referred to as al-kalimah in the Islamic tradition. Others have glossed say that which is more virtuous as a reference to enjoining right and forbidding wrong (Mw, Q), a
repeated Quranic injunction (see 3:104c).

One of the ways in which Satan seeks to mislead human beings according to the Quran is by provoking *ill feeling between them*; see 5:91, where Satan seeks to *sow enmity and hatred* . . . *through wine and gambling*; and 12:100, where it is Satan who *incited evil* between the prophet Joseph and his brothers. That Satan is a *manifest enemy* of human beings (see also 2:168, 208; 6:142; 12:5; 28:15; 35:6; 36:60; 43:62) is established in the accounts of Adam’s temptation and fall (7:22).

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54 Your Lord knows you best. If He wills, He has Mercy upon you, and if He wills, He punishes you, and We have not sent thee as a guardian over them.

54 The *you* in this verse refers to the believers, continuing the address in v. 53. God *knows you best* means that He has full knowledge of the states of human beings and arranges their affairs for their well-being (Ṭs). That God is merciful toward or forgives whomever He wills and punishes whomever He wills is mentioned in several verses (cf. 2:284; 3:129; 5:18, 40; 29:21; 48:14; 76:31) and in most cases is thought to pertain to forgiveness and punishment in the Hereafter. In the present verse, however, some indicate that it means that God may show Mercy to the believers by delivering them from the persecutions of the pagan Makkans or may punish them by continuing to grant the Makkans power over them (Q, R, Ṭs). Or, if v. 53 is read as addressed to the disbelievers themselves, the present verse would mean that God may either lead the disbelievers to faith or punish them for their disbelief (Q, R). The Prophet is *nota guardian over them*; his only responsibility is to deliver God’s message to them (see 5:92c; R); see also 6:66; 10:108; 39:41; 42:6.

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55 And thy Lord knows best whosoever is in the heavens and the earth. And We indeed favored some of the prophets over others, and unto David We gave the Psalms.

55 That God has *favored some of the prophets over others* means that, while all prophets possess the highest spiritual station among human beings (Ṭs), God has also given spiritual gifts of varying kinds in different degrees to different prophets;
see 2:253c. Elsewhere, the Quran indicates that true believers “make no distinction between” the prophets, meaning that they believe in all the prophets, and make no distinction with regard to their belief in the various prophets (see 2:136; 285; 3:84; 4:152c). Here, however, the Quran is referring to the distinctions between the prophets with regard to the gifts and vocations they have been given by God. This verse presents the example of David, who was given various gifts (see 2:251; 21:79–80; 38:17–20; 34:10–11) and was also distinguished by his being given the *Psalms*, which translates *al-Zabūr*. This Arabic term is generally assumed to refer to the Psalms found in the Biblical corpus; and the Judeo-Christian tradition considers some of the Psalms to be of Davidic authorship. The *Psalms* (*al-Zabūr*) are described by some commentators as a revealed book containing no religious law, but only praises and glorifications of God (Q). The Psalms are also mentioned as a scripture given to David in 4:163; the Psalms are mentioned without explicit connection to David in 21:105.

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56 Say, “Call upon those whom you claim apart from Him, but they have no power to remove affliction from you, nor to change [it].”

The Quran challenges the idolaters to *call upon* the false deities whom they claim to worship other than God, seeking their help; see 7:194–95; 10:38; 11:13. The Quran indicates that they *will not answer* (28:64), that they have no power to help those who worship them (34:22), and that these false objects of worship will forsake their worshippers on the Day of Judgment (6:94; 7:37; 10:28; 16:86; 28:62–64; 40:73–74). That none can *remove affliction* or change it (see also 6:17) is something the Quran argues that people know innately, since in a situation of true peril or affliction or when faced with judgment and punishment in the Hereafter, they will call only upon God (see, e.g., 6:40–41, 67; 10:12c).

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57 It is they who make supplication, seeking a means of approach to their Lord. Which of them is nearer? And they hope for His Mercy and fear His Punishment. Truly the Punishment of thy Lord is something of which to be wary.
57 According to some, it is the false deities and partners that the idolaters associate with God who make supplication and seek a means of approach to God (see 17:42c), because these partners are servants like themselves (7:194); that is, they are created. According to others, this verse refers to the angels, whom the idolaters falsely claimed were the daughters of God (IK, T, Ts, Z), or to the jinn, whom the idolaters took as partners with God (IK, T, Ts, Z); see 6:100: They make the jinn partners with God, though He created them. As created beings with free will, the jinn are also subject to Divine Judgment, and so they hope for His Mercy and fear His Punishment. On the importance of hope and fear as complementary attitudes toward God on the part of the faithful, see 7:56c; 32:16c. One of the ways in which those falsely worshipped by the idolaters will seek a means of approach to God is by forsaking the idolaters who worshipped them (see 17:56c). God’s Punishment is something of which to be wary, even for the prophets (Z); see 10:15, where the Prophet is told to say, Truly I fear, should I disobey my Lord, the punishment of a tremendous day.

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58 There is no town, save that We shall destroy it before the Day of Resurrection, or punish it with a severe punishment. That is inscribed in the Book.

58 The Quran frequently mentions the destruction of “towns” for the wrongdoing of their inhabitants (e.g., 7:4, 59–101; 17:16; 21:11; 22:45), and this destruction usually means the utter uprooting and annihilation of their people (T, Z). In this verse, however, destruction is the fate that awaits all towns before the Day of Resurrection. Some commentators suggest that although all towns will eventually be destroyed, righteous towns will be “destroyed” through ordinary death, whereas severe punishment, entailing terrifying modes of destruction, is the fate of those that are wicked (Q, Ts, Z). That this fate is inscribed in the Book—likely a reference to the Preserved Tablet (see 85:22c; T, Ts)—means that the appointed time of destruction for all towns has already been decreed (cf. 7:34; 15:4; 18:59).

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59 Naught hinders Us from sending signs, save that those of old denied them. And We gave unto Thamūd the she-
camel as a clear portent, but they wronged her. And We do not send down Our signs, save to inspire fear.

59 This verse is widely viewed as a response to the repeated requests from the Quraysh for a sign to confirm the truth of Muhammad’s prophethood, as when they reportedly asked him to turn the sacred hill of Ṣafā into gold (IK, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z); see also 6:109 and commentary as well as 6:37; 7:203; and 10:20, where these requests for signs are dismissed. In at least one case, however, the Prophet is reported to have responded to the request for a sign by cleaving the moon so that it appeared in two halves in the sky (see the introduction to Sūrah 54; 54:1c). Those of old—that is, previous peoples—had asked for and been granted similar signs, but they denied them, just as the Quraysh dismissed the cleaving of the moon by saying they had merely been “bewitched” by the Prophet. Indeed, the Quran indicates that such signs are often rejected (6:4), and as a consequence punishment is brought down swiftly upon the deniers (6:157). The verse then gives the example of Thamūd, who slaughtered the sacred she-camel God had sent them in response to their request for a sign, and suffered annihilation by God shortly afterward; see 7:73–79; 11:61–68; 26:141–58; 54:23–31; 91:13–14. Given that signs are often rejected, and rejection brings destruction, God’s withholding of such requested signs (other than the cleaving of the moon) from the Quraysh ultimately represented an act of mercy, according to commentators (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). God sends signs only to inspire fear, that is, as a warning and admonition (Ṭs, Z).

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60 And [remember] when We said unto thee, “Surely thy Lord encompasses mankind.” We did not ordain the vision that We showed thee, save as a trial for mankind, and the Accursed Tree in the Quran. And We inspire fear in them, but it increases them in naught but great rebellion.

60 This verse assures the Prophet that thy Lord encompasses mankind in both power and knowledge, and that none of their actions can overcome His ability to protect and aid the Prophet (JJ, R,Ṭ). Others maintain that it refers to God’s informing the Prophet of his eventual victory over the idolaters of the Quraysh at the Battle of Badr (2/624) and in general (R, Z).

The vision that God grants the Prophet is most commonly understood to mean the vision he received on the Night Journey, when he was taken from Makkah to
Jerusalem and from there to the Divine Throne in a single evening (see 17:1c; JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). This vision became a trial or a test, since it led even some of the Prophet’s supporters to doubt him, as they found it difficult to accept his account of this event (JJ, Ṭ). Alternately, some suggest that this vision refers to the dream the Prophet had in Madinah that he and his followers would make the pilgrimage to Makkah. When their attempted pilgrimage was blocked by the Quraysh on the outskirts of the city (see the introduction to Sūrah 48), the apparent thwarting of the Prophet’s vision became a test of faith for some of his followers (R, Ṭ, Z). Still others have suggested that the vision was a reference to a vision the Prophet had of his overcoming the Quraysh at either Badr (2/624) or the conquest of Makkah (8/630; R). However, since these three events occurred in the Madinan period, it is unlikely that the vision in this Makkah sūrah refers to them (R, Ṭ).

The Accursed Tree in the Quran refers to the tree of Zaqqūm (37:62; 44:43; 56:52), which is created of fire (Ṭ) and has spathes like the heads of satans (37:65). It is accursed in that those who will eat from it are cursed and its fruit is poisonous (R) or because it is distant from all good things and from God’s Mercy (R, Z).

The idolaters of the Quraysh ridiculed both the Prophet’s account of the Night Journey and the Quranic reference to the tree of Zaqqūm; with regard to the latter, they were incredulous that a tree could grow and not be consumed in the Fire of Hell, which elsewhere is said to consume even stones (JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). Abū Jahl, one of the leaders of the opposition to the Prophet in Makkah, mockingly dismissed the fearful descriptions of the tree of Zaqqūm, suggesting instead that the tree was a source of wonderful rich foods that they would delight in eating (R, W). Thus although the description of the Accursed Tree was, like all of God’s signs (see v. 59), meant to inspire fear, it only increased the Makkans’ opposition to the Prophet and the Quran. In other verses, the revelations, warnings, and signs that God delivers through His messengers serve to increase denial in some (cf. 5:64, 68; 17:41, 82; 25:60; 35:42; 71:6).

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And when We said unto the angels, “Prostrate before Adam,” they all prostrated, save Iblīs. He said, “Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?”

The prostration of the angels before Adam (2:34; 7:11; 15:29–31; 18:50; 20:116; 38:73–74) is understood to indicate the superiority of the spiritually perfected human being (or Adam before the fall) even over the angels, particularly
with regard to his knowledge (see commentary on 2:31–33). Iblīs’s question, *Shall I prostrate before one whom Thou hast created of clay?* (see also 15:33), demonstrates the arrogance for which he is rebuked in 7:13. Iblīs’s disregard for Adam on the basis of his physical constitution is made most explicit in 7:12 and 38:76, where he explains his refusal to prostrate before Adam by saying that whereas Adam was made of clay, he himself was made of fire, with the assumption that fire is nobler than clay; see 7:12c.

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62 He said, “Dost Thou see this, which Thou hast honored above me? If Thou dost grant me reprieve till the Day of Resurrection, I shall surely gain mastery over his progeny, all save a few.”

62 For slightly fuller accounts of Iblīs’s request for reprieve from punishment and God’s explicit granting of the request, which is only implicit here, see 7:14–15; 15:36–38; 38:79–81. Iblīs’s threat to gain mastery over Adam’s progeny is a threat to lead them astray from the straight path; see 7:16–17; 15:39–40.

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63 He said, “Go! And whosoever among them should follow thee, surely Hell shall be thy recompense—an ample recompense!

63 In response to Iblīs’s threat, God banishes him with the command *Go!* (cf. 7:13; 15:34; 38:77) and a promise to fill Hell with those who follow him in 7:18. *Hell shall be thy recompense* is thus a threat addressed to both Iblīs and those whom he will lead astray; similar threats issued collectively to Satan and his human followers are found in 15:43; 38:85. See also 11:119 and 32:13, where jinn and human beings are said to be punished together in Hell.

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64 So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice, and bear down upon them with thy cavalry and thy
infantry, and be their partner in wealth and children, and make them promises.” Satan promises them naught but delusion.

64 So incite whomsoever thou canst should not be understood as a command to Iblīs, but rather as an indication that God will not interfere in the struggle between Iblīs and humanity (Z). It may also be a challenge meant to reveal Iblīs’s ultimate weakness (Q), since he has no power over God’s servants (v. 65). Many commentators nonetheless raised the issue of why God would grant Satan respite and allow him to tempt people in these various ways. According to some Mu‘tazilite thinkers, God did this in order to intensify the moral challenges facing human beings in this world and thus provide them with greater opportunity to be rewarded in the Hereafter (R).

That Iblīs (or Satan) incites with his voice may refer to any of the various means by which he attempts to mislead human beings (Q, R, Ṭ). Some commentators suggest that with thy voice may refer to Satan’s misleading human beings through singing or music (IK, Q, R, Ṭ), and this verse was often cited by those who maintained that singing and music should be prohibited in Islam (Q). The verse does not, however, explicitly mention music or singing, and the mention of Satan’s voice as the instrument of his provocations is more likely an allusion to Satan “whispering” his inducements to people (see 7:20; 20:120; 114:4c). Although the Quran does not directly mention music at all, the acceptability of different kinds of music varies across different Islamic perspectives and cultural settings, and some legal scholars explicitly prohibit all musical forms other than the chanting of the Quran and the call to prayer (adhān). Beyond these forms of chanting, however, music and indeed musical expressions of Islamic piety have always had a place in Islamic culture, beginning with the account of the Prophet Muhammad being greeted by a joyous song as he entered Madinah for the first time. This song, known by its first line, Ṭala‘a al-badru ʿalaynā (“The Full Moon Has Risen over Us”), is still remembered and sung often today.

Bear down upon them translates ajlib, which may also mean to “call forth against them” (Q, R, Z), continuing the connection with Satan’s voice, or it may mean to bring all of one’s forces and might upon them (Q, R). Satan’s cavalry and infantry was interpreted by some to mean “all those who ride or walk in acts of disobedience” (IK, JJ, Q, R, Ṭ), whether they are jinn or human beings, since both are capable of leading others astray (Q, R, Ṭ; cf. 41:29; 114:6). In several verses, wealth and children signify the good things of this world (e.g., 3:14; 9:69; 18:46) and as such can be a source of “trial” for human beings (8:28). Satan is their partner in wealth and children when either of these two are acquired or treated wrongfully or are means of distraction from God and religion. In the case of wealth,
this may refer to Satanic incitement to acquire wealth through usury or other illicit means or to spend it in immoral ways. With regard to children, this may refer to Satan’s incitement to fornication and adultery, through which children may be produced; to mistreating, misleading, or even killing children (IK, JJ, R, T); or to taking pride in having children.

Satan will make them promises as a means of inciting them to wrongdoing (cf. 4:120; 14:22), perhaps by suggesting to them that there will be no Resurrection or Reckoning and no Heaven or Hell (JJ, Q, R) or by giving them hope that they will be protected by the intercession of idols and false deities in the Hereafter (R). The description of his promises as naught but delusion offers a clear contrast with the repeated Quranic assertion that God’s Promise is true (see, e.g., 4:122; 10:4; 14:22; 18:21; 30:60; 35:5), and it is consistent with the Quranic reference to Satan as the Deluder (31:33; 35:5; 57:14).

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65 “As for My servants, truly thou hast no authority over them.” And thy Lord suffices as a Guardian.

God’s servants over whom Satan has no authority most likely refers to God’s righteous servants (R, Z); see 15:40 and 38:83, where Satan himself exempts God’s sincere servants from those whom he will cause to err. That Satan has no authority over God’s sincere servants is understood to mean that he cannot succeed in leading them astray (Z); see also 15:42. Some commentators suggest, however, that servants may refer to all morally responsible individuals, and that this verse thus indicates Satan’s ultimate powerlessness over all human beings, who are alone responsible for their spiritual and moral error, as in 14:22, where Satan says to human beings, I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. That God suffices as a Guardian is also mentioned in 3:173; 4:81, 132, 171; 33:3, 48.

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66 Your Lord is He Who makes the ships sail upon the sea, that you might seek of His Bounty. Verily, He is Merciful unto you.

The existence of ships that can carry human beings over the water is repeatedly mentioned as a sign of God’s Power and Benevolence and as a gift for
which people should be grateful (see 2:164; 14:32; 16:14; 30:46; 31:31; 35:12; 40:80; 42:32; 43:12; 45:12).

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67 And whenever affliction befalls you at sea, forgotten are those whom you would call upon, save for Him. Then when He has delivered you safely to land, you turn away. Man is ever ungrateful!

67 This is one of several verses in which people are moved to call upon God when faced with peril at sea (see 6:40–41; 10:22–23; 29:65; 31:32). In the face of such danger, the false deities whom people used to call upon are forgotten (lit. “lost”), seeming suddenly useless and contemptible in their eyes (Q, T, Z). Yet when God has delivered them safely to land, they turn away from their momentary devotion to God alone and revert to their previous practices (cf. 7:189–90; 10:22–23; 29:65; 30:33; 31:32; see also commentary on 10:22–23). That humanity, or at least most human beings, are ungrateful by nature is also mentioned in 14:34; 22:66; 25:50; 42:48; 80:17; 100:6. Ungrateful translates kafūr, which derives from the same root as kāfir, meaning “disbeliever.” The two meanings are profoundly related in Islamic thought, in that to be a disbeliever is to exist in a state of ingratitude toward God for the various gifts and blessings He has provided.

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68 Do you feel secure that He will not cause the shore to engulf you or unleash a torrent of stones upon you? Then would you find no guardian for yourselves.

69 Or do you feel secure that He will not cause you to return to it another time, and unleash upon you a tempestuous wind, and drown you for your having been ungrateful? Then you would find no avenger therein against Us.

68–69 Following the indictment of people’s ingratitude in v. 67, this set of
rhetorical questions emphasizes their constant liability to Divine Punishment for having been ungrateful; the disbelievers’ false sense of security is similarly challenged in 7:97–99; 12:107; 16:45–47; 67:16–17. For the relationship between worldly security and ingratitude, see also 10:7 and 16:112. The rhetorical questions in this verse invoke some of the punishments brought down on other disbelieving people according to the Quran, as in 29:40: Each We seized for his sin. Among them are some upon whom We sent a torrent of stones, and among them are some whom the Cry seized, and among them are some whom We caused the earth to engulf, and among them are some whom We drowned. The punishment of being “engulfed by the earth” is mentioned in 28:81 and 34:9. A torrent of stones destroyed the people of Lot (11:82; 15:74; 54:34) as well as the masters of the elephant (105:1–4). Torrent of stones translates ḥāṣib, which may also mean a violent wind that is destructive on land (Ṭs).

Cause you to return to it another time means that they may be returned to a situation of peril at sea (Q, T, Ṭs) after having been delivered from it in v. 67. Tempestuous wind translates qaṣīf, which some describe as a destructive wind at sea (Ṭs).

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70 We have indeed honored the Children of Adam, and We carry them over land and sea, and provide them with good things, and We have favored them above many We have created.

According to some, God has honored the Children of Adam by granting them authority over other creatures and by making the rest of creation subservient to them (see, e.g., 14:33; 16:12; T, Ṭs). Others mention various blessings given uniquely to human beings, including their use of arms and hands (which other animals do not employ in the same way; Ṭs, Z), their powers of intellect, discernment, and speech (R, Ṭs), and their ability to know God (Ṭs). In the Quran God also ennobled Adam and, by extension, his progeny by creating him with His two Hands (38:75), breathing into him of His Spirit (15:29; 32:9; 38:72), and endowing him with extraordinary knowledge (2:31). Human beings are carried over land by riding animals, which are mentioned elsewhere as a Divine blessing (16:8; 40:79), and over . . . sea by ships, for which the Quran indicates people should be grateful (see 17:66c). The good things provided to them refer to the various kinds of food and drink provided for them on earth (Ṭ; cf. 8:26; 16:72; 40:64). That God has favored them above many whom He has created means,
according to some, that He favored them over all that He has created (Ṭs),
including even the angels (Ṭ, Z), as indicated in God’s command to the angels to
commentators consider God’s “honoring” the Children of Adam as referring to the
worldly blessings He gives them and His “favoring” them to spiritual blessings
(Ṭs) or the blessings of the Hereafter (Mw).

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71 On the Day We shall call every people by their imam,
whosoever is given his book in his right hand, it is they
who shall read their book, and they shall not be wronged so
much as the thread of a date stone.

An imām (anglicized as imam) is a person or sometimes a source of
religious instruction taken as a guide or model to be imitated. The term derives
from a root meaning to be or stand in front of something; imām can thus refer to one
who, standing in front, leads the Muslim congregation in prayer. In the Islamic
tradition, imām is also a title given to a religious scholar who has acquired great
knowledge and influence, such as the great theologian and mystic Abū Ḫāmid al-
Ghazzālī (d. 505/1111), who is commonly referred to as Imam al-Ghazzālī.
Lexically, however, imām is a value-neutral term, and the Quran mentions as
imāms both righteous individuals, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (2:124;
21:73), and iniquitous ones, such as Pharaoh and his hosts, who are described as
imāms calling unto the Fire (28:41). That people will be called by their leader
may mean that they will be called according to the prophet (see 4:41c), the
revelation (see 45:28), or the religion that they followed in this life (IK, Q, R, Ṭ,
Ṭs, Z). The imāms of disbelievers or wrongdoers are those who led them into
moral and spiritual error, including Satan or other evil guides and authorities (IK,
Q, R, Ṭs). By extension, the imāms by which people are called may refer to the
spiritual leaders, religious scholars, or indirectly the religious schools of thought
that they followed in this life (Q, Ṭs, Z).

Among Twelver Shiites, imām is the title given to the twelve inerrant spiritual
guides of the community from among ahl al-bayt, that is, the family and descendants
of the Prophet. According to the eighth Shiite Imam, ʿAlī al-Riḍā, “On [the Day of
Judgment] He will call all people by the imām of their time, the Book of their Lord,
and the sunnah of their prophet” (Ṭs; see also Q for a similar statement attributed
to ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib). According to the sixth Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, everyone will
be called according to the Imam of their time, and the (Shiite) Imams will be called
by the Prophet Muhammad (Ṭs). Although the twelfth and last of the Twelver Shiite Imams was said to have gone into indefinite occultation in 329/941, Twelver Shiites believe that this Imam continues to guide the Shiite community to the present day, and he is thus considered by contemporary Shiites to be the Imam of their time (ṣāḥib al-zamān).

Their leader in this verse may also be a reference to the book of their deeds (IK, Q, R,Ṭ, Ṭs), since imām is used in 36:12 to refer to the record of human deeds. This reading also seems to be supported by the subsequent mention in the present verse of those receiving their book in their right hand. Al-Qurṭubī suggests that this book is referred to as an imām because it is consulted as an authoritative register of their deeds (see below). Another, less favored, interpretation reads imām as an unusual plural of umm, meaning “mothers,” thus suggesting that all people will be called by the names of their mothers. Those who mention this interpretation indicate that this might be done for the sake of Jesus, who had no father; or to manifest the noble descent of the Prophet’s grandsons, Ḥasan and Husayn, by calling them by the name of their mother, Fāṭimah; or in order to avoid defaming the children born of adultery (Q, Ṭs, Z).

Still others give imām an inward, spiritual interpretation, suggesting that it refers to the inner reality or particular character trait that defined a person in life: this may be a virtue, such as generosity, the thirst for knowledge, or bravery; or a vice such as hatred, passionate desire, or anger (R; see also Q for a similar interpretation).

To be “given one’s book” is to be presented on the Day of Judgment with the full account of one’s deeds (see, e.g., 18:49; 45:29). Receiving one’s book in the right hand is an indication of Divine Contentment, and receiving it in the left portends Divine Wrath (Ṭs; see 69:19–25; 84:7–8). Those given their book in the right hand read it willingly and with joy (Ṭs), but those who receive the book in their left hand are, according to al-Zamakhsharī, so overwhelmed with fear, shame, and regret that they are incapable of reading it. Human beings will not be wronged in the Hereafter (see also 2:272, 281; 3:25; 6:160; 8:60; 19:60; 23:62; 39:69) even so much as the thread of a date stone, since God does not treat people unjustly even in the slightest way; see 4:49–50c; 4:77, 124; 19:60.

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72 And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way.

72 Whosoever was blind in this [life] most likely means whoever is blind in “this world” (R, Ṭ); such people will be blind in the Hereafter, for if they are
blind in this world to the knowledge and reality of God, they will be blind in the Hereafter to the path to Paradise (R). According to the interpretation of many commentators, such people will indeed be more blind in the Hereafter (R, Ṭ, Z), since in this world the possibility of repentance remains open, but in the Hereafter it will be closed to them (R). This latter interpretation fits better the context of the verse, which also describes such people as further astray in the Hereafter. Alternately, the verse can be interpreted to mean that “whosoever is blind regarding these [earthly blessings],” which are mentioned in v. 70 and which can easily be seen, is even more blind to the Hereafter, whose blessings are still hidden from human perception (R). The blindness mentioned here and in many other places in the Quran refers to spiritual rather than physical blindness, for truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind (22:46; cf., e.g., 2:18, 171; 5:71; 6:50). Regarding blindness in the Hereafter, see also 20:124–26. Using a different metaphor, the Quran indicates that on the Day of Judgment the cover that had obscured the truth for people will be removed and their sight will be piercing (see 50:22c).

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73 And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee, that thou mightest falsely ascribe unto Us something other than it, whereupon they would surely have taken thee as a friend.

74 And had We not made thee firm, thou wouldst certainly have inclined toward them a little.

75 Then We would have made thee taste double in life and double in death. Then thou wouldst have found for thyself no helper against Us.

73–75 According to one report, these verses were revealed when the people of the town of Thaqīf asked the Prophet to grant them a year’s respite during which they could continue to worship their deity, al-Lāt, before fully embracing Islam, or else to make their land as inviolable and sacred as Makkah, or both (JJ, Ṭ, W). Another report connects these verses with the pagan Makkans’ request that the Prophet come close to and touch their idols (Ṭ, W)—according to some versions,
they requested this in exchange for their permitting him to approach and touch the Black Stone of the Kaʿbah (Ṭ). The reports indicate that the Prophet was close to accepting these terms, as indicated by the opening line of v. 73, *And they were about to tempt thee away from that which We revealed unto thee*. But God then thwarted their attempt by making the Prophet firm in the face of their offer (v. 74), demonstrating His protection of the Prophet from moral and spiritual error as well as from the machinations of those who would do evil (IK, Z).

Had the Prophet inclined toward them a little, he would have been made to taste double, meaning double punishment from God, both in life and in death. According to some, the double punishment in death refers to the punishment in the grave before the Day of Resurrection and the punishment in the Fire after the Day of Judgment (Z). Doubled or multiplied punishment is also mentioned for those who lead others astray (see 7:38; 11:19–20) and for those whose spiritual status would make any serious moral error or sin on their part particularly egregious; for example, the wives of the Prophet are told that, should they commit indecency, their punishment will be doubled (33:30). Although Islamic doctrine holds unequivocally that the Prophet was Divinely protected from sin (*maṣūm*), al-Zamakhsharī states, perhaps hypothetically, that the high station of the Prophet would have made any sin on his part especially abominable. He further reports that when v. 75 was revealed, the Prophet said, “O God! Do not entrust me to my own soul, even for the blink of an eye.”

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76 And they were about to incite thee from the land, in order to expel thee therefrom, whereupon they would not have tarried after thee, save a little—

77 the wont of those among Our messengers whom We sent before thee. And thou wilt find no change in Our wont.

76–77 Those who were about to incite thee from the land most likely refers to the Quraysh, who through persecution and enmity eventually drove the Prophet and his followers from Makkah (IK, Mw, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). According to some commentators, the fact that the Quraysh did not forcibly expel the Prophet from Makkah averted total or immediate Divine punishment for the Quraysh (R, Ṭs); rather, the Prophet left by Divine Command. If they had expelled him, they would not have tarried thereafter save a little, meaning they would have been annihilated by Divine Wrath. This is because it is the Divine wont to punish through complete
destruction those who reject their messengers sent by God (Ṭ, Z), as was the case with those who rejected earlier messengers such as Noah, Hūd, Šāliḥ, Shuʿayb, Lot, and Moses. There is no change in God’s wont (cf. 33:62; 35:43; 48:23), that is, in His Will with regard to human beings and His response to their obedience or disobedience.

To incite thee can also be interpreted to mean “to kill thee.” In this case, the latter part of v. 76 can be understood to mean that once the Quraysh had attempted to kill the Prophet, which immediately preceded the Prophet’s migration to Madinah, the Quraysh did not remain in their former state save a little, meaning for a short amount of time. This is because within two years of his migration to Madinah, the Battle of Badr significantly weakened the Quraysh (Mw, R, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

According to a minority interpretation, v. 76 refers to some Jews of Madinah who tried to persuade the Prophet to leave Madinah by arguing that he should go to the land of Syria, from which their previous prophets arose (IK, R, Ts, Z). Some reports mention that the Prophet nearly agreed to this suggestion before the verse was revealed (IK, R, Z). Commentators have generally considered the connection of this verse with the Jews of Madinah unlikely, however, since the present sūrah is Makkan and thus predates the Prophet’s time in Madinah.

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Perform the prayer at the declining of the sun till the darkening of the night. And the recitation at dawn—truly, the recitation at dawn is ever witnessed!

78 This verse is commonly interpreted as alluding to all five canonical prayers and the times of day when they are to be performed. Although some consider the declining of the sun a reference to the sunset (maghrib) prayer (Bḍ, Mw, Q, Ṭ), most understand it as referring to the moment when the sun first begins its decline and to the prayer performed at that time, namely, the midday, or zuhr, prayer (JJ, Bḍl, Mw, Q, Ṭ). The prayer performed at the darkening of the night is most commonly thought to refer to the night, or ʿishāʾ, prayer. Thus the command to perform the prayer from the declining of the sun till the darkening of the night can be understood as a reference to completing all four prayers performed during that time period, namely, the zuhr (midday), ʿaṣr (late afternoon), maghrib (sunset), and ʿishāʾ (evening) prayer (Bḍ, JJ, Ṭs, Z). For Shiites, who often pray the two afternoon prayers and two evening prayers together, the prayers performed at the declining of the sun are the zuhr and ʿaṣr, and those performed at the darkening of the night are the maghrib and ʿishāʾ (Ṭs). In some Sunni schools of law, the
darkening of the night may refer simply to the disappearance of the sun (Q), although the Shi’ite (Ja’farī) school considers it to mean the disappearance of the sun and all its rays or the beginning of the middle of the evening (Ṭs). Since the present surah was revealed in Makkah, the various interpretations of this verse as relating to specific prayer times may, however, be a result of commentators reading the ritual regularity of the prayers as they were established by Prophetic practice in the middle Madinan period back into the late Makkan and early Madinan periods of the Prophet’s life.

The recitation at dawn refers to the fifth canonical prayer, namely, the fajr prayer (Bḍ, JJ, Q), performed between dawn and sunrise. Although most understand the recitation at dawn to refer to the dawn prayer as whole, which like all canonical prayers entails recitations from the Quran, some suggest that it is specifically the Quranic recitation performed during this prayer that is referenced here (Mw, Q). The recitation at dawn is ever witnessed by the angels of both the day and the night, according to several aḥādīth (Bḍ, Mw, Q, Z).

Although most commentators consider this verse to concern the five canonical prayers, some Sufi commentaries suggest that the command to perform the prayer at these various times throughout the day is also a reference to the importance of continuous, inward prayer, or the “prayer of the heart” (Aj), meaning the constant remembrance and invocation (dhikr) of God, since the goal of Sufis is to be in a state of constant invocation (dā’im al-dhikr).

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79 And keep vigil in prayer for part of the night, as a supererogatory act for thee. It may be that thy Lord will resurrect thee in a praiseworthy station.

79 This injunction to perform the night vigil prayer (tahajjud) is addressed specifically to the Prophet, although other Muslims may and many do also perform it. It is described here as a supererogatory act for thee, but most commentators agree that the night vigil was made obligatory for the Prophet (Ṭ); see also 73:1–2c. The night vigil is thus referred to as a supererogatory act only figuratively (Q) or because it is a supererogatory or voluntary act for all other Muslims (Ṭ); see 73:20. The night vigil is said to be a source of merit for the Prophet and a means of expiation for other believers (Mw, T, Ṭs). In the present verse, the Prophet’s performance of the night vigil is implicitly connected with his being resurrected in a praiseworthy station, which many commentators consider a reference to the Prophet’s power of intercession in the Hereafter (Mw, Q, T, Ṭs) or
to his being seated near the Throne and carrying the “Banner of Praise” (liwāʾ al-ḥamd) on the Day of Resurrection (Mw, Q, Ṭ).

The night vigil, which has the same form as the obligatory canonical prayers in its recitations and movements, is performed in the latter part of the night, after one has already slept for a while (Ṭ, Ṭs, Q), although some hold that it may be performed either before or after sleeping (Mw). According to al-Qurṭūbī, the purpose of all supererogatory acts is the spiritual expansion, joy, and ennobling of the soul; and the night vigil brings particular spiritual benefit because the prayer is performed when one is completely alone with God.

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80 And say, “My Lord! Make me enter in a sincere manner, and make me go forth in a sincere manner, and ordain for me, from Thy Presence, an authority to help me.”

80 As with v. 76, this verse is read in the context of the Prophet’s emigration from Makkah to Madinah (W, Z). Some commentators report that when the Makkans wanted to expel the Prophet forcibly, God commanded the Prophet to migrate to Madinah before they could carry out their intention, thereby preserving the people of Makkah from destruction through Divine Punishment for expelling their messenger (W); see 17:76–77c. Thus the Prophet’s prayer that he might enter in a sincere manner pertains to his entrance into Madinah, and his prayer that he might go forth in a sincere manner pertains to his going forth from Makkah (JJ, Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). The entering may also refer to the entrance into the grave at death, and the going forth to the going forth from the grave at the time of the Resurrection (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z). Others suggest that the entering and going forth may pertain to all situations into which the Prophet entered or from which he went forth (Z), including his prophetic mission (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z).

The Prophet is instructed to pray for authority to help him in establishing the religion of Islam (Ṭ, Ṭs, Z) and aid him in overcoming its opponents (JJ, Ṭ, Z)—a prayer that is perhaps particularly appropriate in the context of his emigration from Makkah to Madinah, since it was in Madinah that the Prophet acquired the social and political authority to establish a society guided by Quranic principles, and it was from Madinah that he was able eventually to establish Islam in the whole of Arabia (Ṭ).

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Say, “Truth has come, and falsehood has vanished. Truly falsehood is ever vanishing.”

This is perhaps the most well known of several Quranic verses that establish the total incommensurability of truth and falsehood, in that truth is always and inherently victorious over falsehood, which is ultimately nothingness and thus always “vanishes” in the face of truth; see also 21:18 and 34:49. This is one of the most often quoted verses of the Quran, used in both political and intellectual contexts. The Prophet is reported to have repeated this verse continuously as he smashed the idols around the Ka‘bah after Makkah had surrendered and accepted Islam in 8/630 (R, Ṭs). In context, the Truth that has come may refer to the Quran or to the religion of Islam in general, in the face of which idolatry and false religion were made to vanish (R, Ṭ). From a metaphysical perspective, however, Truth refers to the one certain, unchanging, Necessary Being or Reality, which is God, whereas falsehood ultimately refers to all contingent realities, which are ever subject to annihilation and indeed are ever in the process of annihilation, or “vanishing” (K).

And We send down of the Quran that which is a cure and a mercy for the believers. And it increases the wrongdoers in naught but loss.

In several verses, the Quran and other scriptures are described as a mercy or as containing mercy (see 7:52, 154; 28:43; 31:2–3). The Quranic revelation is described as a cure explicitly only here, although it is implied in 10:57, where the exhortation brought to the Prophet is described as a cure for that which lies within breasts. Some mention a ḥadīth, “Whosoever does not seek a cure from the Quran, God will not cure him” (R, Z). For those who are receptive to its guidance the Quran is said to be a cure for various ailments of the heart, including ignorance, doubt, hypocrisy, rancor, hatred, and enmity (K); and it is a mercy insofar as it helps one acquire virtue and perfection of character and adorns one with wisdom and knowledge (K). The Quran is both mercy and cure for the believers, but it has the opposite effect upon the wrongdoers, whom it increases . . . in naught but loss. That Divine Revelation may have the effect of leading those who are wrongdoers or iniquitous even further astray is mentioned elsewhere; see, for example, 2:26; 5:64; 9:124–25.
And whenever We bestow a blessing upon man, he turns away and withdraws. And whenever evil befalls him, he is in despair.

The Quran presents the vagaries of human existence as a spiritual and moral test, since God tries people with evil and with good (21:35). Yet, human beings often fail the test, responding to “blessing” with disdain (see also 41:51), arrogance, and self-satisfaction (11:10; 39:49; 41:50), rather than with the gratitude they should feel, since whatever blessing they have, it is from God (16:53; see also 4:79). When evil befalls human beings, they are given to despair (see also 41:49) and to anxiety (70:20) and will sometimes call upon God, only to forget Him again when the evil has passed (see, e.g., 10:12; 16:54; 30:33). Their response, however, should be to bear their affliction with patience (22:35; 31:17) and to say, Truly we are God’s, and unto Him we return (2:156).

Say, “Each acts according to his disposition, and your Lord knows well who is more rightly guided on the way.”

Disposition here may be a reference to one’s inward nature or inclination (IK, Ṭ), to one’s spiritual path (R, Ṭ, Z), or to one’s religion and the doctrines that one accepts (IK, R, Ṭ, Z). To act according to one’s disposition may mean to act according to what one believes to be right and just (Ṭs) or according to one’s intentions (Qm, Ṭ). That your Lord knows well who is more rightly guided (cf. 53:30) has a universal import, but in its specific historical context, it was likely intended as a warning to the disbelievers in Makkah, similar to the statement that the Prophet is instructed to make to the disbelievers in 11:121: And say unto those who believe not, “Act according to your position; we, too, are acting” (IK).

They ask thee about the Spirit. Say, “The Spirit is from the Command of my Lord, and you have not been given knowledge, save a little.”
85 The Spirit here and elsewhere in the Quran may refer to the Spirit that is the source of human life (JJ, T, Ts, Z), as God breathes into Adamof His Spirit (32:9; cf. 38:72). As such, many Muslim thinkers consider it the source of human knowledge, perception, and spiritual capability and thus also of human beings’ religious, moral, and spiritual obligation. The Spirit may also refer, according to some, to the Archangel Gabriel (Z), the angel of revelation, who is given the title the Holy Spirit, as in 16:102: Say, “The Holy Spirit has brought it down from thy Lord in truth, to make firm those who believe, and as guidance and glad tidings for those who submit.” According to a tradition from ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, the Spirit is an angel with seventy thousand heads, each of which has seventy thousand tongues with which he praises God (Ts). Another opinion interprets Spirit here as a reference to the Quran (Z). On the basis of this verse, Spirit (rūḥ) is often identified with the realm of Divine Command (ʿālam al-amr). That the Spirit comes down or is revealed by God’s Command is also mentioned in 16:2; 40:15; 42:52, and in 97:4 the Spirit and the angels descend by the leave of their Lord, with every command. Various reports indicate that the present verse was revealed in response to a group of either Madinan Jews or Makkan idolaters who asked the Prophet about the Spirit (W).

86 And if We willed, We could take away that which We revealed unto thee. Then thou wouldst not find, for thyself, any guardian against Us,

87 save a mercy from thy Lord. Truly His Bounty toward thee is ever great.

86–87 Although both of these verses employ the second-person singular, which usually indicates an address to the Prophet specifically, most commentators read v. 86 as addressed to people in general (T, Z) or to both the Prophet and his community (Ts). The last sentence of v. 87, however, is widely held to be addressed to the Prophet (BD, IK, Q, R, Ts); in it Bounty refers to his station of excellence among human beings (Q, R, Ts; cf. v. 79) and his status as “the seal of the prophets” (R, Ts; 33:40). In v. 85, human beings are said to have been given only a little knowledge, and v. 86 thus warns that even this little can be taken away (Q, R).

That God might take away what He had revealed is said to refer to His ability to remove the Quran completely from human access, that is, by removing it from
both the “breasts” of human beings (i.e., from their memories) and written copies (R, Ṭ, Z). The Companion and early Quran commentator ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. ca. 29/650) said, “The first thing that will be lost from your religion is trust and the last that will be lost is prayer, so that people will pray but will have no religion, and you will awaken one day and there will be nothing of the Quran with you. . . . It will be taken by night, and people will awake in the morning and all of it will have been lifted from the written copies and removed from the hearts” (Z). ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿUmar (d. 74/693), the son of the second Caliph, ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭāb, is reported to have said, “The Hour will not come until the Quran is returned whence it descended” (Q). When it returns, it will complain that the people were reciting it, but not acting in accord with it (Q).

That they have no guardian after the removal of revelation means they would have no one (Ṭ) who could return the Quran to them (R, Z). The exceptions save a mercy means either that God might choose not to remove it or that He might return it after removing it (Q, R, Z). Both the warning and the exception indicate that God’s Mercy is manifested not only in revealing the Quran, but also in preserving it in the hearts and writing of human beings (R, Z). God’s Mercy and His Bounty are mentioned together in v. 87 as well as in 2:64; 4:83, 113, 175; 24:10, 14, 20.

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Say, “Surely if mankind and jinn banded together to bring the like of this Quran, they would not bring the like thereof, even if they supported one another.”

This verse was reportedly revealed in response to a request by some Madinan Jews that the Prophet produce a new verse of revelation to prove his prophethood. The Prophet responded by reminding them that they know that the Quran is only from God, since its teachings are consistent with the Torah’s teachings (Ṭ).

The impossibility of mankind and jinn producing something like the Quran serves as an argument for the Divine provenance of the Quran; it is similar to the challenges issued to the opponents of the Prophet to produce a revelation like the Quran (2:23; 10:38; 11:13) solely to demonstrate their inability to do so. The Quranic assertion that they could never produce the like of the Quran is understood as proof of the inimitability of the Quran—a fundamental doctrine held by all Muslims. The Quran cannot be imitated, it is understood, in any of its aspects, including its eloquence, the beauty of its organization and composition (Z), the knowledge it contains, the excellence of its content and refinement of its
expression, or the absence of inconsistency within the text (Ţs).

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89 And indeed We have employed every kind of parable for mankind in this Quran. Yet most of mankind refuse aught but disbelief.

89 That God has employed every kind of parable (cf. 18:54; 30:58; 39:27) is understood to mean that He has employed in the Quran all of the indications, proofs, and modes of expression that people need to reflect upon for their religious and worldly life (Ţs); that in it He has given human beings every reminder of the truth as well as everything that they need to follow and do (Ţ); and that the Quran presents every argument, conclusive proof, and explanation that human beings need to understand the truth (IK). Parables are employed throughout the Quran, sometimes in the form of short allegories (18:32–43), but more commonly as short or extended metaphorical images (10:24; 13:17; 14:18, 24–26; 16:75–76, 112; 18:45; 29:41; 39:29), some of which, like the Light Verse (24:35), are symbolic images with deep metaphysical and cosmological meaning. The elusive meaning of such parables, especially for disbelievers, is mentioned in some verses as a source of their doubt about the Quran (cf. 2:26; 74:31). That most of mankind refuse aught but disbelief is repeated in 11:17; 12:103; 40:59.

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90 And they say, “We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth,

91 or till you have a garden of date palms and grapevines, and you make streams gush forth in the midst of it,

92 or till you make the sky fall upon us in pieces, as you have claimed, or you bring God and the angels before us,

93 or till you have a house of gold ornament, or you ascend to Heaven. And we shall not believe in your ascension till
you bring down unto us a book we can read.” Say, “Glory be to my Lord! Am I aught but a human being, a messenger?”

90–93 These verses relate a series of demands presented to the Prophet by the leaders of the Quraysh (Ṭ, W), who implored him to desist from preaching in Makkah and sought to bribe him with worldly goods. When that strategy did not work, they asked him for various signs (Ṭ, W) that would demonstrate power over worldly matters, such as the production of springs, gardens, streams (v. 91), or items of gold (v. 93), or that would serve as proof of his prophethood, such as the fulfillment of his warning about the sky falling upon them (v. 92), bringing them into direct contact with God or the angels, or ascending to Heaven and bringing down a book. According to some, their request that the Prophet bring God and the angels is a request to see God directly (Ṭ); a similar request is made by the Israelites in 2:55. The request that the Prophet bring a physical book that they can read is also made by the Makkan disbelievers in 6:7 and 6:124 as well as by the People of the Book in 4:153. Disingenuous requests for signs from the Prophet Muhammad and earlier prophets are mentioned in various places in the Quran; see commentary on 6:7–9; 6:37; 13:31.

That God might punish people by causing the sky to fall upon them in pieces is also mentioned in 34:9. Your ascension is understood to refer to their challenge to the Prophet to ascend to Heaven, which immediately precedes it (R, Ṭ). The Prophet’s response to their extravagant requests, Am I aught but a human being, a messenger? indicates his inability to perform such signs upon demand and that he is completely dependent upon God for the “signs” he receives; see also 18:110; 41:6; and 14:11, where similar responses are given by earlier messengers as well.

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94 And nothing hindered men from believing when guidance came unto them, save that they said, “Has God sent a human being as a messenger?”

95 Say, “Were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace, We would have sent down upon them an angel from Heaven as a messenger.”
In various Quranic passages, disbelievers dismiss the messengers as “mere human beings like themselves” (cf. 11:27; 14:10–11; 21:3; 23:24, 33–34, 47; 26:154, 186; 36:15; 54:24; 64:6; 74:25) and indicate that they expect an angel rather than a human being as a messenger (6:8; 11:12; 15:7; 25:7, 21; 43:53). That God would have sent an angel as a messenger were there angels walking about upon the earth in peace is consistent with the Quranic assertion that when God sends messengers, He chooses those messengers from among the very people to whom they are sent (3:164; 7:35, 63, 69; 9:128; 10:2; 16:113; 23:32; 38:4; 62:2); since it is human beings and not angels who walk about on earth, He sends other human beings as messengers (R, Ṭ). Some also mention the idea that angels are not perceptible to most human beings (Bḍ, Ṭ), and thus sending a messenger in angelic form would not be effective; hence in 6:8–9 it is said that even if God were to send an angel as a messenger, He would send him in the form of a human being; when the Archangel Gabriel appeared to Mary, the mother of Jesus, he assumed for her the likeness of a perfect man (19:17).

Say, “God suffices as a Witness between you and me. Verily, of His servants He is Aware, Seeing.”

That God suffices as a Witness is mentioned in 4:79, 166; 13:43; 29:52; 46:8; 48:28. In 6:19, the Prophet invokes God as Witness between you and me, meaning between himself and the disbelievers in Makkah. That God is described as Aware of His servants and as Seeing is meant as a consolation to the Prophet and as a threat to the disbelievers (Z); see also vv. 17, 30.

Whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided; and whomsoever He leads astray, thou wilt find no protectors for them apart from Him. And We shall gather them on the Day of Resurrection upon their faces—blind, dumb, and deaf—their refuge shall be Hell. Every time it abates, We shall increase for them a blazing flame.

Regarding whomsoever God guides, he is rightly guided and the
subsequent mention of the fate of those whom *He leads astray*, see 18:17; 7:178. For some this statement suggests that God alone determines the fate of human beings by either guiding them or leading them astray, whereas others indicate that God only leads certain people astray as a punishment for disbelief or iniquity; see 7:178c. The Quran indicates that the disbelievers’ rejection of revelation is the result of a kind of spiritual insensitivity, which is likened to being *blind, dumb, and deaf*; see 2:18c; 2:171; 5:71; 6:39; 8:22. The description of the unrelenting punishment of Hell with which this verse ends is similar to that in 4:56, where it is said that whenever the skin of those in Hell is burned away, it is replaced with new skin.

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98 That is their recompense for having disbelieved in Our signs. And they say, “What! When we are bones and dust, shall we indeed be resurrected as a new creation?”

98 In several places, the disbelievers express their skepticism about the Resurrection by posing questions about the possibility of giving new life to *bones and dust*; see 17:49–51c; 23:35, 82; 36:78; 37:16, 53; 56:47; 79:10–11.

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99 Have they not considered that God, Who created the heavens and the earth, has the power to create the like of them? And He has ordained for them a term, about which there is no doubt. Yet the wrongdoers refuse aught but disbelief.

99 The greatness of God’s creative Power is invoked in response to the disbelievers’ skepticism regarding His ability to give new lives to the *bones and dust* of dead bodies (v. 98); see also vv. 49–51; 14:19; 21:30; 29:19; 46:33. Since *everything with God is according to a measure* (13:8; cf. 15:21; 25:2), all individual creatures have a decreed *term*, referring to their life span and their eventual judgment by and before God (see also 6:60; 11:3; 19:75); such terms are also decreed for communities of human beings (7:34) and the world as a whole (30:8; 46:3). There is no doubt about this decreed *term*, just as there is no doubt
about the Last Day, Resurrection, and Judgment, as mentioned in 3:9, 25; 4:87: 6:12; 18:21; 22:7; 40:59; 42:7; 45:6, 32. For the statement that the wrongdoers refuse aught but disbelief, see commentary on 17:89, where the same statement is made about most of mankind.

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Say, “Were you to possess the treasuries of my Lord’s Mercy, you would surely withhold them, out of fear of spending. Man is ever miserly!”

100 In this verse the Prophet is told to address the Makkans in response to their requests for signs in vv. 90–93 (R). The treasuries of my Lord’s Mercy may refer to the worldly goods (T) that are part of the Divinely bestowed provision, or rizq, for each human being (Z) or to all blessings, including nonworldly ones, decreed and bestowed by God (Ts). The treasuries of God’s Mercy and Bounty are limitless, but the nature of human beings is such that, even if they were to possess limitless bounty, they would still withhold it (R), irrationally, out of a fear of spending. The fear of spending derives from an inherent fear of poverty and need that exists in all human beings because, as creatures, they exist by definition in a state of existential poverty (R). Man is ever miserly, because, given this existential poverty, people can only be generous with what is superfluous to their own needs (R, Ts); or if they give, they give only to get something in return (R). Yet many fail to recognize that their instinct for miserliness derives from their own existential poverty and that God alone is the Rich and beyond need, while they are the poor (47:38); see 92:8, which is critical of the one who is miserly and deems himself beyond need. By contrast, God, who has no need, gives to all without limit—to the obedient and the disobedient (Ts).

Other commentators note that people only love good things when they benefit themselves (Aj), and that when they are generous, they are acting contrary to their own innate disposition toward miserliness (Su). Regarding the miserly nature of human beings, see 70:19–21. The Quran repeatedly criticizes miserliness (3:180; 4:37; 9:76) and counsels people to spend in moderation, avoiding the extremes of both prodigality and miserliness (see 17:26–27 and commentary; 25:67).

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And We indeed gave unto Moses nine clear signs. So ask the Children of Israel. When he came unto them,
Pharaoh said, “Truly I think that you, O Moses, are bewitched!”

101 Commentators consider the *nine clear signs* given to Moses (see also 27:12) to refer to the various miracles performed by Moses during his prophetic mission, although they do not all agree upon which ones are referred to here, and al-Rāzī maintains that the verse should not be understood to mean that Moses was given only nine signs. The Bible mentions ten plagues brought by Moses upon Pharaoh and his people: blood, frogs, lice, flies, disease of cattle, boils, hail, locusts, darkness, and death of the firstborns (see Exodus 7–11). Some commentators suggest that the *nine clear signs* in this verse refers, similarly, to the successive punishments brought upon the Egyptians in 7:130–33 (drought, shortage of crops, flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood) along with other miracles Moses performed. Combining the lists given by different commentators, the nine signs may also be said to include: the miracle of Moses’ staff turning into a serpent (7:109; 20:19–21; 26:32; 28:31); his hand turning white after being placed in his bosom (7:108; 20:22; 26:33; 27:12; 28:32); the “untwisting of a knot” from his tongue (20:27–28); the plagues of flood, locusts, lice, frogs, and blood (7:133) as well as the drought and scarcity that preceded these plagues (7:130); the parting of the sea (2:50; 26:63); the “blotting out” of the wealth of Pharaoh and his notables in response to Moses’ prayer (10:88); his making streams come forth by striking a rock with his staff (2:60; 7:160); the miraculous provision of manna and quails in the desert (2:57; 7:160; 20:80); and the mountain towering over Moses and the Israelites at Sinai (see 2:63–64c; 2:93; 4:154; 7:171; IK, JJ, R, Ṭ, Z). Alternately, the *nine clear signs* given to Moses are identified in a ḥadīth as referring to the nine prohibitions given by Moses to his people, namely, the prohibitions against associating other gods with God, theft, adultery, murder, sorcery, usury, slandering chaste women, fleeing from a just and righteous battle, and working on the Sabbath; the last of these, unlike the other eight prohibitions, is unique to the Israelites (IK, R, Ṭ).

Pharaoh’s accusation that Moses is *bewitched* (*mashūr*) is similar to accusations that he is a sorcerer (10:76; 20:57, 63; 26:34; 27:13; 28:36; 40:24; 51:39). Some commentators read *bewitched* in this context as synonymous with being a sorcerer (R, Ṭ), but others suggest that here Pharaoh is accusing Moses of being misled or confused by sorcery (JJ, Z).

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102 He said, “You certainly know that no one has sent these
down as clear portents, save the Lord of the heavens and the earth. And truly I think that you, O Pharaoh, are doomed.”

**102** Clear portents here renders baṣāʾir (lit. “insights” or “perceptions”), which may thus be interpreted to mean signs that should cause people to “perceive” the truth (Ṭ). Other commentators gloss clear portents as clear arguments or proofs for the truthfulness of Moses’ prophethood (IK, R) or as clear indications of God’s Power and Oneness (Q). Moses tells Pharaoh that he (Pharaoh) “certainly knows” that these portents are sent by God alone, despite his rejection of them. According to al-Rāzī, it should be obvious to any who use their intellect that such signs could only be Divine in origin, and it is only willful stubbornness that prevents Pharaoh from accepting them as such. See 27:14, where it is said that Pharaoh and his people rejected the signs of Moses though their souls were convinced of them. Doomed translates mathbūr, which can also mean “destroyed” (cf. 25:13–14; R, Ṭ), prevented from all goodness (R, Ṭ), or devoid of reason or intelligence (Ṭ).

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**103** And he desired to incite them from the land; so We drowned him and those with him all together.

**103** That Pharaoh desired to incite Moses and the Israelites from the land parallels the desire of the Quraysh to incite the Prophet Muhammad from Makkah (see 17:76–77c). As in v. 76, to incite them from the land can refer to removing them from the land by either exiling or killing them (Q, R) or to inciting them to leave as a result of harassment (Ṭs). The word for incite, yastafizza, is the same verb used in v. 64 in God’s challenge to Satan, So incite whomsoever thou canst among them with thy voice. Thus the word might also mean to “unsettle” or “disturb.” That Pharaoh and his people were subsequently drowned (see also 2:50; 7:136; 8:54; 10:73, 90; 43:55) therefore served as a warning to the Quraysh of the fate that might await them if they continued to reject Muhammad and persecute his followers. Despite their efforts to eliminate Moses and the Israelites, it is Pharaoh and his supporters who are drowned, because evil plotting besets none but its authors (35:43; R).

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And We said thereafter unto the Children of Israel, “Dwell in the land. And when the promise of the Hereafter comes to pass, We shall bring you as a mixed assembly.”

God’s command to the Israelites to *dwell in the land* may refer to their settling parts of the land of Egypt, now devoid of Pharaoh and his supporters (Z), to their settling in Palestine (Canaan; Ṭ), or to both (Q); see 7:137c. As Pharaoh’s destruction in the previous verse was meant to be a warning to the Quraysh, this verse can be understood as a glad tiding to the Prophet of the future conquest of Makkah for Islam (IK). The Children of Israel will be brought in the Hereafter *as a mixed assembly*, meaning that there will be various types of people among them—noble and base, obedient and disobedient, pious and iniquitous, strong and weak (R)—or that God will bring them and their enemies together for judgment on that day (IK).

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In truth We sent it down, and in truth it descended. And We sent thee not, save as a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner,

Cf. 2:119. *In truth We sent it down* refers to God’s having sent down the Quran commanding justice and virtue and forbidding injustice and iniquity (Ṭ) and to the impossibility of anyone altering it (IK). The Quran attests in many verses that the Prophet has been sent as *a bearer of glad tidings and as a warner* (see also 2:119; 5:19; 25:56; 34:28), as have all the prophets before him (2:213; 4:165; 6:48; 18:56).

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and [We sent it down] as a recitation We have divided in parts, that thou mayest recite it unto men in intervals, and We sent it down in successive revelations.

That the Quran was sent down *divided into parts* is understood to refer to the successive and gradual revelation of the Quranic verses to the Prophet (JJ, Ṭ), allowing him to *recite it* to his followers *in intervals*. Some commentators say
that the Quran was sent down as a whole to the lower heavens in a single night (IK, Ṭ), the “Night of Power” (Laylat al-qadr; see the introduction to Sūrah 97: 97:1–2c), which refers to one of the odd-numbered nights in the last ten days of the month of Ramadan. It was then gradually revealed to the Prophet over twenty-three years. The Quran is also understood by some as having been sent down as a whole into the very heart of the Prophet (see 26:192–94) on this same night; it was then gradually revealed to his consciousness over the period of his prophethood. The reference to the Quran as divided can also refer to the division of the Quran into distinct sections (IK, Ṭ), for example, into verses (āyāt) or into sūrah of unequal length.

The wisdom of the Quran’s revelation in discrete sections is precisely that it allowed the Prophet to recite it unto men in intervals, so that they would have time to learn it properly, memorize it, and come to understand it (Bḍ, Ṭ). In 25:32, when the Quraysh express skepticism about the revelation of the Quran in parts, rather than as a whole, a similar reason is given for its gradual descent: It is so, that We may make firm thine heart thereby. And We have recited it unto thee in a measured pace; see commentary on this verse. We sent it down in successive revelations affirms that the gradual revelation is a matter of Divine purpose.

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107 Say, “Believe in it, or believe not.” Surely those who were given knowledge before it, when it is recited unto them, fall down prostrate on their faces.

107 The Prophet is instructed to say to the Makkān disbelievers regarding the Quran, Believe in it, or believe not, meaning their belief or disbelief has no effect upon God (Bḍ, Ṭ), for the disbelievers’ rejection cannot harm God in the least (see 3:144, 176; 11:57; 47:32). Moreover, if the Makkans refuse to believe, those who were given knowledge before, meaning the People of the Book, or at least some of them, are said to recognize the Quran’s Divine provenance; and as followers of Divine Revelation, the People of the Book are better and nobler than the pagan Makkans (Bḍ, Ṭ). See 2:146 and 6:20, where the People of the Book are said to recognize the Quran as they recognize their own children (see also 19:58; 28:52–53). For the believers and the pious among the People of the Book, the recitation of the Quran “softens their hearts and moistens their faces” (Z), as in 5:83, referring to Christians: And when they hear that which was sent down unto the Messenger, thou seest their eyes overflow with tears because of the truth they recognize. According to Ibn Kathīr, when it is recited unto them they fall down prostrate in gratitude for having lived to see the Prophet as described in their
scriptures. Demonstrating humility and obedience upon hearing the Quran is the response of believers, and thus the failure to do so is indicative of disbelief; see 84:20–21, where the Quran asks concerning the disbelievers of Makkah, *So what ails them that they believe not, and when the Quran is recited to them, that they do not prostrate?*

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**108** And they say, “Glory be to our Lord! The Promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled.”

The exclamation here of the People of the Book that *the Promise of our Lord is indeed fulfilled* may refer to the fulfillment of His Promise to send a future prophet to guide them (Z). Elsewhere, God’s Promise is said to be fulfilled at the time of the apocalypse (73:18), and the Quran repeatedly asserts that the Promise of God is true (see 4:122; 10:4, 55; 18:98; 31:33; 35:5; 40:55, 77; 45:32; 46:17).

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**109** And they fall down on their faces, weeping, and it increases them in humility.

According to some commentators, the believers among the People of the Book *fall down on their faces, weeping* when they hear the Quran recited because of their humility toward God and their belief in His Book and His Prophet (IK) or because they are greatly moved by the teachings of the Quran (Bдж). Also see 19:58, which describes the prophets and progeny in the line of Noah and Abraham as falling down *prostrate and weeping* upon encountering the *signs of the Compassionate.* In other verses, the different responses of individuals to hearing the Quran or to encountering the signs of God in any form are indicative of their inward state of belief or hypocrisy (see, e.g., 9:124; 74:49–51; 17:41c).

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**110** Say, “Call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate. Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names. And be not loud in your prayer, nor too
quiet therein, but seek a way between."

110 One can call upon God, or call upon the Compassionate, because the latter, one of the most important Names of God, is considered a Name pertaining to the Divine Essence; see 1:3c. Although the description of God as the Compassionate (al-Raḥmān) is found throughout the Quran, it is also used on its own as a proper Name of God in several places, including throughout Sūrah 19, Maryam, “Mary” (see, e.g., 19:18, 26, 44, 58, 61). According to one report, this verse was revealed after some of the Makkāni idolaters heard the Prophet invoking God as “O God (Allāh), O Compassionate (Raḥmān)” or, according to another account, “O Compassionate, O Merciful (Raḥīm)” and accused him of invoking two separate Divine beings (Bāḏ, Ik); this verse was revealed to make it clear that these Names, and indeed all of the Most Beautiful Names, refer to the One God. The mention of God’s Most Beautiful Names is also found in 7:180; 20:8; 59:24. For the significance of the Names of God in Muslim belief, practice, and piety, see 7:180c.

One should be not loud in . . . prayer (see also 7:205), but rather demonstrate reverence and humility when praying. Elsewhere, the believers are enjoined not to raise their voice before the Prophet or to raise it above his voice (49:2–3), and some understand this to mean in the context of the prayer when the Prophet was leading it. As this verse comes at the end of an extended rhetorical challenge to the Makkāni idolaters, some indicate that the injunction Be not loud in your prayer meant that one (or perhaps specifically the Prophet, since the command is in the second-person singular) should recite quietly, lest the idolaters overhear the prayer and respond by cursing or disparaging the sacred act (Bāḏ, Ik).

One should also not be too quiet in prayer, lest those who might benefit from hearing the recitation be unable to hear it (Ik); or when leading others in prayer, the imām, or prayer leader, should not recite so quietly that it is inaudible to those praying behind him (Bāḏ). Another report indicates that this injunction pertains to personal supplicatory prayer (duʿāʾ), although the verse uses salāḥ, which usually designates the canonical prayer (Ik). That one should seek a way between is consistent with the Quran’s exhortation toward moderation in other matters, for example, being neither miserly nor prodigal when one spends in the way of God (25:67); also, Muslims constitute a middle community (2:143) following a straight path (see 1:6c), which can be read as a path between extremes. According to Ibn ĒAbbās, one should not pray loudly, so as to make an ostentatious display for other people, or too quietly, out of fear of them (Ik).

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And say, “Praise be to God, who has no child! He has no partner in sovereignty; nor has He any protector out of lowliness.” And proclaim His Greatness!

That God has no child is a frequent assertion of the Quran (19:35, 92; 25:2; 39:4; 112:3), presented as a refutation, variously, of the Christian belief in Jesus as the son of God, of Jews’ and Christians’ claim that they are the “children of God” (5:18), and of the pagan Makkan belief in divine or semidivine daughters of God (16:57; 37:149–53; 43:16; 52:39); for a fuller discussion, see 6:100c; 112:3c. Nor has He any protector out of lowliness means that God neither seeks nor needs the aid or support of anyone, as a lowly person might for his own protection. The command to proclaim His Greatness (kabbirhu takbīrān) can be understood as a reference to the commonly repeated formula “God is Great” (Allāhu akbar), known as the takbīr. The takbīr is recited ritually at the initiation of each canonical prayer and at its intervals and is repeated multiple times as part of other prayers, such as the funeral prayer. It is also the opening line of the call to prayer (adhān) and is repeatedly chanted as Muslims gather in the mosque for both ʿĪd prayers. In addition to these ritual uses of the takbīr, Muslims may utter this formula, often in unison, as an exclamation of joy at religiously significant events such as at the conclusion of a marriage ceremony, upon another individual’s embrace of Islam, or even after a particularly moving religious sermon. The takbīr is also uttered as a means of summoning strength, unity, and resolve in the face of a spiritual or physical challenge and is usually uttered when going into battle or as a response to victory in battle.